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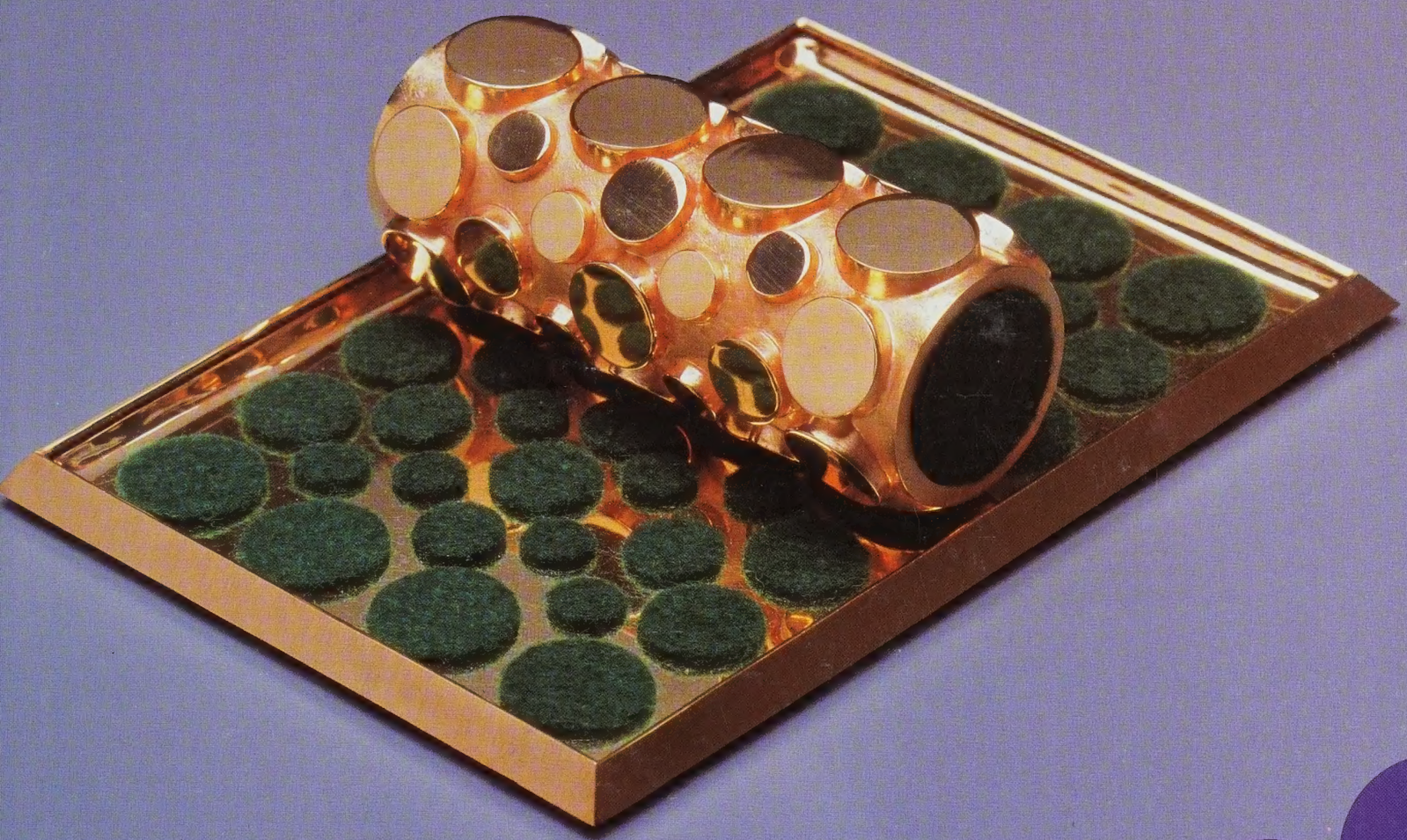

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JEWELRY

Frank Bauer

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Jewelry/Lighting
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November 2 - 5

Helen Shirk

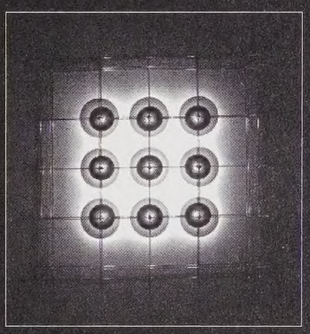
Jewelry; 1970-95
November 8 - December 2, 1995

Bruce Metcalf

December 6 - December 30, 1995

Helen Shirk: Brooch AS 7. 1994
Silver, gold. 8" x 1"

Bruce Metcalf:
Structure Necklace . 1995
mixed media 21" x 16"



Frank Bauer:
Wall Light. 1994
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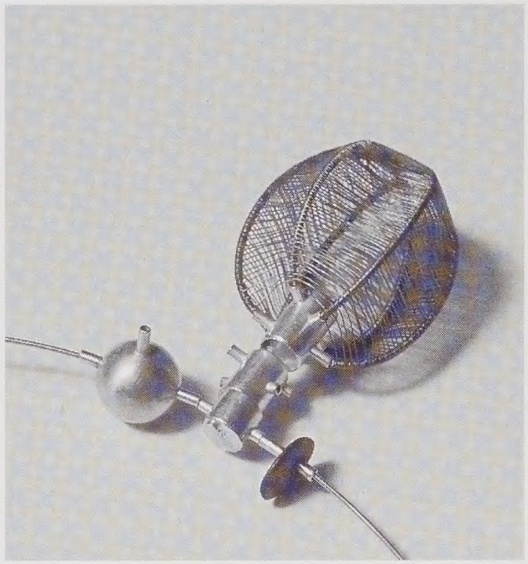

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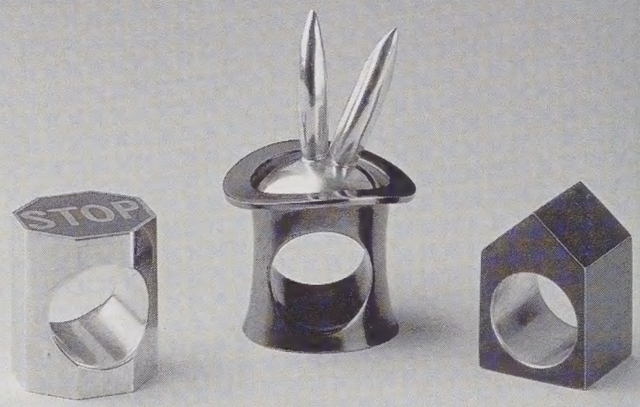
LOUIS MUELLER: JEWELRY



Louis Mueller • Three Rings "Monopoly" • 1995 • fabricated sterling
Photo: Roger Birn

DECEMBER: NEW GOLD II

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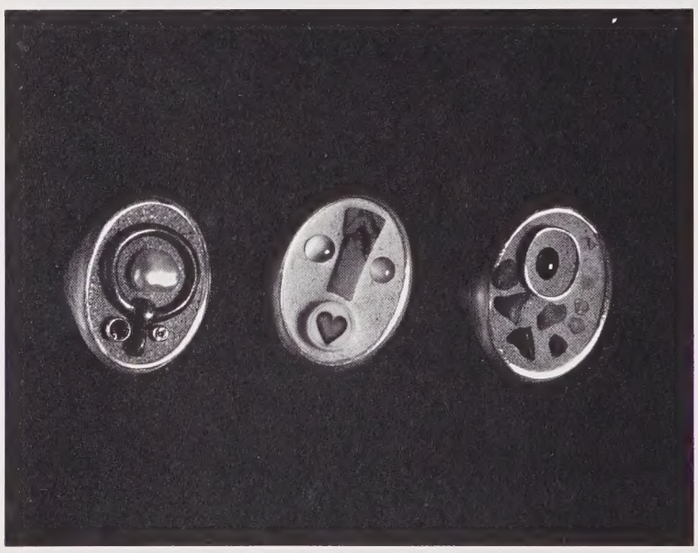

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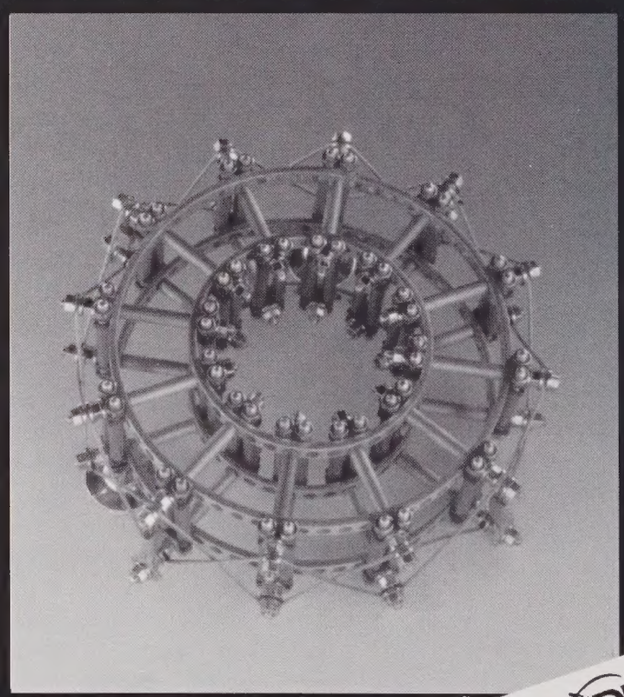

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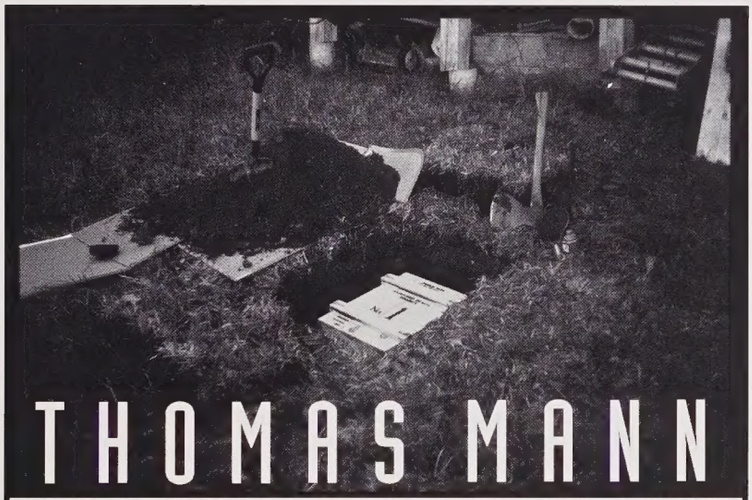

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Frank C. Lewis, Editor
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Editorial

Politics – for many people the word seems to have negative connotations. Of course I am thinking of Washington, D.C. but I am also referring to the number of people in the field of metalsmithing who all but spit out the term when talking about fellow artists, teaching positions, gallery exhibitions, museum collections, and even coverage in the pages of this magazine. "Oh that show is just about politics." "That artist has gotten so much attention because they are so political." I am sure that you have all heard similar refrains.

I think about such *political* issues a great deal. When I go into a gallery I wonder about the different treatment I seem to receive when I introduce myself as the editor of *Metalsmith* as compared to the way I am treated when I look around without introducing myself. I am sure at conferences and symposia that I am not as interesting a person as seems to be indicated by the number of people that seek conversation with me when I am wearing my *Metalsmith* name tag. I must also confess that there are few people who I seek out and talk to, despite the fact that we are probably both dulled into somnambulism by each others' company. (I know for a fact that I can be an insufferable bore.) Every time I assign an article or a review of a metalsmith I wonder about the politics of the situation. Did that work intrigue me because it treats issues that are of particular interest to me? Did the intelligence and excitement of an artist in a phone conversation influence my decision to cover their work outside of the consideration of their work alone? Did the recommendation of a metalsmith whose work I respect and admire influence my decision to run a review of an upcoming artist? Such questions are exacerbated by the fact that I meet and converse with more and more metalsmiths the longer I am involved in the field.

I have decided that what many people mean by *politics* is absolutely unavoidable. I have also decided that it would be foolish of me and any other individuals interested in advancing the field to completely avoid situations that one may think of as political. When a *big name* in the field suggests that I take a look at a particular show or artist, it only makes sense that I take advantage of their experience and familiarity with the history and yes, even the *politics* of metalsmithing. If a teacher calls my attention to one of their recently graduated students, I may well look at that new metalsmith's work with a careful and judicious eye, but it would be folly for me to simply dismiss the instructor's assessment as pure partisan advocacy. Clearly, promotion is a part of a gallery director's job description, yet when a curator or gallery owner calls and tells me that they are showing the "absolute best metalwork being done today" I have to recognize that that gallery has invested a significant amount of time and probably money in an artist that they truly believe deserves attention, so I should at least consider it equally with everything else that comes across my desk.

In a field such as ours, it is almost impossible to either not know a majority of practitioners or to, at least, not have heard of them, through the press, legend, networks, and even gossip. Such *politics* are a valuable resource which, if treated carefully and with a sense fairness and wisdom, can give a writer, curator, or an editor an advantage over a less *political* advocate of metalsmithing. On the other hand, you don't want to hear what I have to say about politics in Washington, D.C.

F.C.L.

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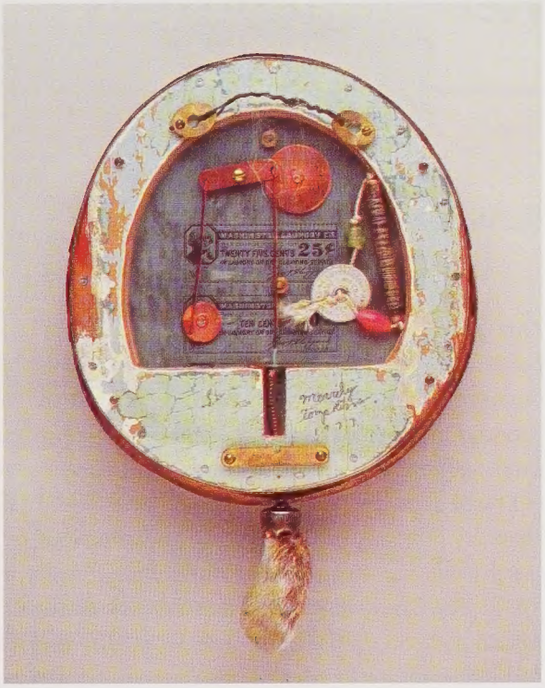

Merrily Tompkins
A Woman and Her Dog (Gov. Dixy Lee Ray), 1977 (reverse view)
sterling silver, enamel, brass, wood, found objects; 7 x 5 x 1"
Collection of Anne Gerber, Seattle, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick, see page 14

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Myra Mimlitsch Gray
Candleholder II, 1995
silver, bronze, bird's eye maple veneer
3 1/2 x 7 1/4 x 7 1/4"
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Recent Sightings

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Jewelry Connoisseurship

No coherent explanation has been advanced for the specific qualities of so-called *art jewelry*. Jewelry with ambitions to the status of art, production jewelry, social jewelry, and fashion jewelry are all mushed together in a single category. Unfortunately, many potential collectors don't realize that there are distinct types of jewelry, and they're confused as to why *art jewelry* should be different (and more expensive) than any other type. As long as those distinctions remain obscure, art jewelry will face a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace.

The first distinction that sets art jewelry apart, is degree of formal and conceptual invention. Art jewelry is invested in the Modernist idea of originality: that something new can be contributed to an existing context. Obviously, nothing is completely original, but degrees of newness exist. For instance, the way Fred Woell and Don Tompkins used found objects to make jewelry into social commentary was new. Even though historical jewelry has often incorporated found material, and found objects had been widely used in painting and sculpture since the early Cubist era, Woell and Tompkins did something fresh with the idea. They combined things in a new way, within the context of jewelry.

To discern innovation requires knowledge, and this is one of the major problems in the marketplace. The failure to properly attribute innovations in American jewelry bedevils this field. The history of contemporary jewelry is fragmentary, and there is no authoritative text for reference. Qualitative distinctions, based on who made the innovation and who followed later, can't be drawn until the history is documented and disseminated. That's why jewelers must educate gallery owners, and the owners must educate their clients.

To further clarify the picture, distinctions can be made between good one-of-a-kind jewelry and production jewelry. Production jewelry is a design repeated in an (usually) open-ended series. In printmaking, the number of repetitions is specified on each print, making explicit how many of the prints exist in the world. While this is not an aesthetic consideration, it *is* a factor in marketing. The marketplace values rarity, and supposedly, the more scarce a commodity is, the more valuable it can be. The indeterminate numbers of production jewelry editions should render them less valuable, compared to unique jewelry. If gallery owners were honest, they would admit that production series may extend into the hundreds. Also, jewelers should number their editions. However, such rectitude is unlikely, and it falls upon the makers of one-of-a-kind jewelry to stress the uniqueness of their work.

After all, part of the *value-added* of unique work is the fact that it is individually considered. We are perhaps accustomed to thinking of labor being only physical, but part of the labor of art is thought. Production work is considered once, and then replicated. The second, tenth, or hundredth reproduction only needs to be manufactured. Even though setting up an efficient production technology requires a special creativity of its own, conceptually the edition is completed with the prototype. One-of-a-kind artists must start anew for each piece.

Mental effort is paralleled by technical effort. In production, techniques that can be taught to minimally skilled bench workers are desirable, so that large numbers of objects can be made at low cost. For this reason, molded and cast jewelry, which can be endlessly repeated by semi-skilled workers, predominates at the low end of the market. Profile dies (for cutting out shapes) and conforming dies (which give form to flat shapes) serve the same purpose. But the best one-of-a-kind jewelers tailor their techniques to fit the idea at hand, and will abandon a technique if it no longer serves their intentions. Lisa Gralnick offers an instructive case. She made a series of fabricated black Plexiglass® jewelry between 1985 and 1989, but turned to silver and gold constructions by 1990. Even though the Plexi jewelry was well received, she embraced a different technology in order to express a different idea.

Alternatively, extraordinary mastery of a narrow range of techniques is also a mark of real achievement. Richard Mawdsley's elaborate constructions of tubing come to mind.

Lastly, there's the importance of integrity. Jewelry is now a vehicle for the exploration of ideas, and I think the best jewelry features an appropriateness between the concept, and the nature and history of jewelry. The newest generation of jewelers use traditional forms and functions of jewelry as an intellectual platform. Keith Lewis, for instance, refers to traditional mourning jewelry to address his personal experiences with the AIDS plague, and Jan Baum uses lockets to talk about psychological masking and layering.

Integrity becomes important when the artist feels an idea is played out. No matter how great the demand for a popular style of work in the marketplace, a good artist will not repeat himself if he feels the idea is exhausted. For example, Daniel Jocz finds that galleries are constantly asking him for the famous series of rings that incorporated organic forms in polymer clay, which he made in 1990. But he refuses to make any more; the idea no longer compels him. In a perfect world, such integrity would be honored and rewarded.

Innovation, uniqueness, variation within series, technical range or technical mastery, integrity of idea: these are distinctive markers of good jewelry. However, it takes time to recognize such qualities. A casual observer who knows little about the history and craft of jewelry won't necessarily be sensitive to such subtleties. One must learn to see these distinctions, which is what connoisseurship is all about – and the future of jewelry as an art form depends on it.

Bruce Metcalf makes jewelry and teaches occasionally in Philadelphia.

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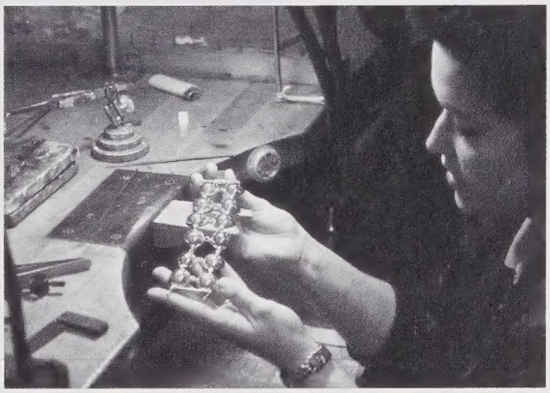

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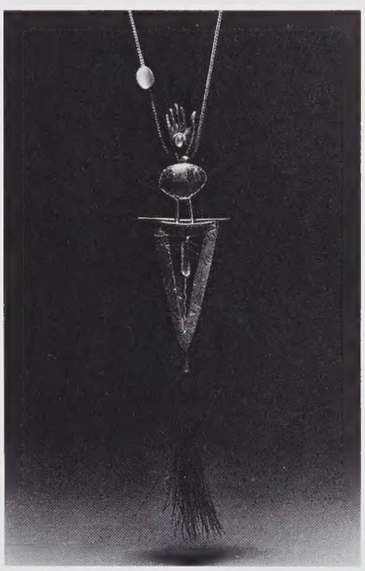

Enid Kaplan, "Abundance", 1995, Amulet
in Sculpture (detail), 14K s/s, copper, moonstone, agate, quartz, horsehair.
Photo: Todd Flashner.

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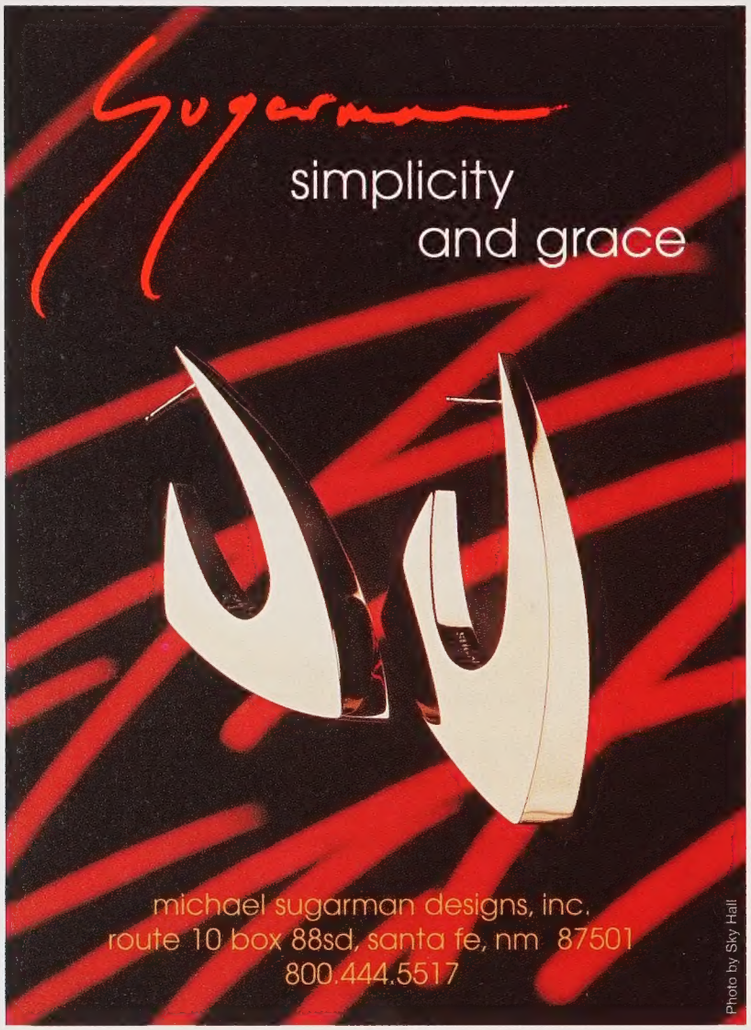

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Currents A contemporary Survey of Jewelry by SNAG Members

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opening in
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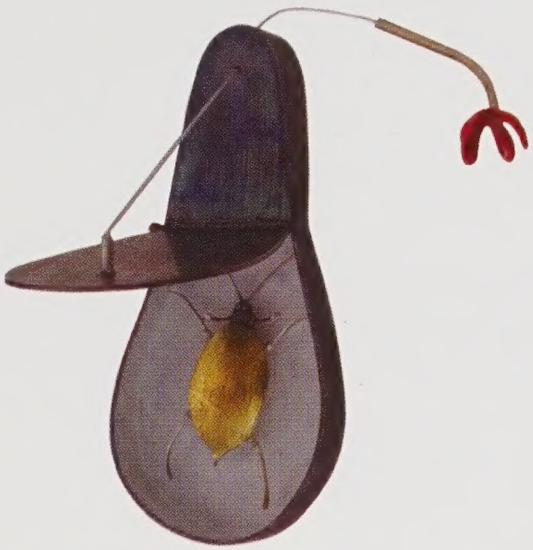
GABRIELLE GOULD



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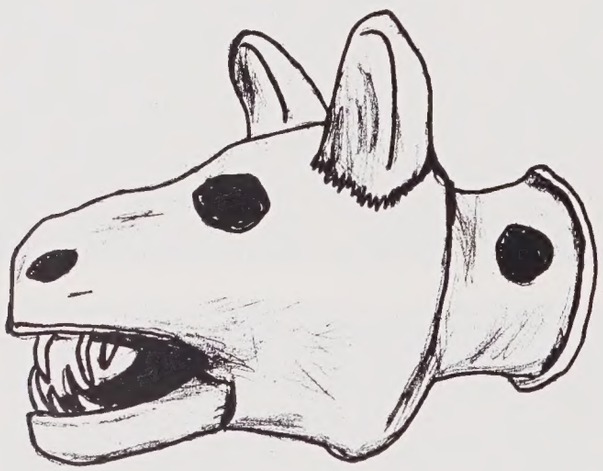
Book review

by Judy Bjorkman

Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries: the Archaeological Evidence

by P. R. S. Moorey
New York, Oxford University Press, 1994
xxiii + 414 pp.; 8 b/w plates, 24 figures, 5 maps
Clothbound, $98.00



ABOVE
Electrum wolf's head from a tomb at Tepe Gawra in northern Mesopotamia. 3.0 x 2.5 cm. Ears attached by copper pins; lower jaw by an electrum pin. Teeth made of electrum wire. Interior of head filled with bitumen. Circa: 3200 B.C.E.

For those interested in the world's earliest references to metalworking, Roger Moorey's *Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries* is a long-needed and classic work. Moorey, Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford University, has accomplished the difficult task of presenting comprehensive discussions of early artifactual remains, their uses and technological aspects, ranging from Iran to Turkey, from the Stone Age to the fourth century B.C.E.. The book's chapters cover stone, bone, ivory, shell, ceramic, faience, glass, precious and base metals, brick, wood, and reed. Although the emphasis is on archaeological remains, Moorey also has included much of the relevant literary evidence from clay tablets written in cuneiform script.

Authors who want to set their work in some historical framework can find it difficult to obtain accurate information on jewelry making materials and processes from these ancient times. Too often, China and Greece have been given a pride of place which rightly belongs to the Sumerians or other ancient Near Eastern peoples such as the Akkadians, Egyptians, Hittites, and Canaanites. Moorey's book, meant to be a companion volume for J. R. Harris's 1962, classic work, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, overcomes this problem by providing comprehensive and up-to-date information. In addition, Moorey's wide-ranging interests and background allow him the control over the data which is lacking in such older works as R. J. Forbes's *Studies in Ancient Technology*.

This is not exactly a *coffee-table* book – it has a limited number of photographs and drawings. For those, consult general books on Mesopotamian art and architecture or some of the over 2,000 books and articles in Moorey's extensive bibliography. But if, for example, you want to know about the earliest lost-wax castings in copper (mid-fourth millennium B.C.E.), the appearance of filigree and cloisonné, the varied uses of lead beginning at least as early as the sixth millennium B.C.E., the distant sources of the lapis lazuli and carnelian which the Sumerians sought so eagerly, the uses of ivory (from hippopotamus, elephant, or boar's tusks), the long development from glazed stones to true glasses, the remnants of artisan's workshops, a discussion of the so-called Hittite monopoly on early iron production – these are a tiny fraction of the informational treasures to be mined here.

Moorey's book has a helpful chronology for the reader as well as general maps of the sites referred to, a detailed table of contents and bibliography, and a useful index. You may wish to suggest to your professional club or to a university or public library that they purchase this book. It is a very well-written, solid reference work which will not be superseded in the foreseeable future.

Judy Bjorkman recently received her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Her field of special interest is metals and metalworkers in the Ancient Near East. She is herself a metalworker and lives in Syracuse, NY.

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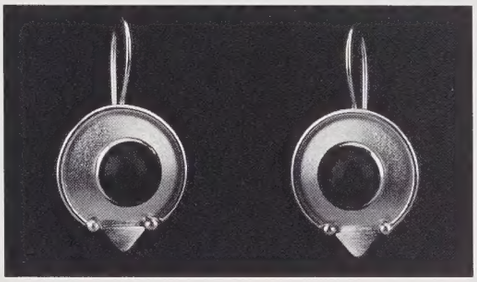

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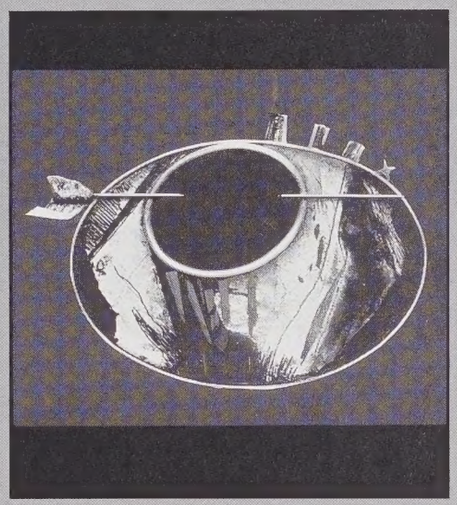

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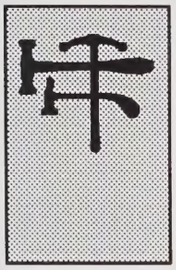

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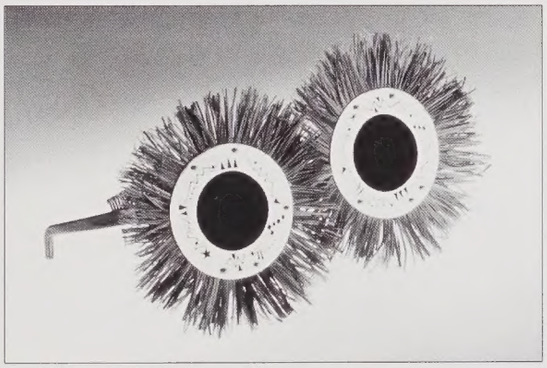

Tami Dean, "Zatchoo"
Bronze, sterling silver, copper, brass 14K gold, mirror, raffia, rubber

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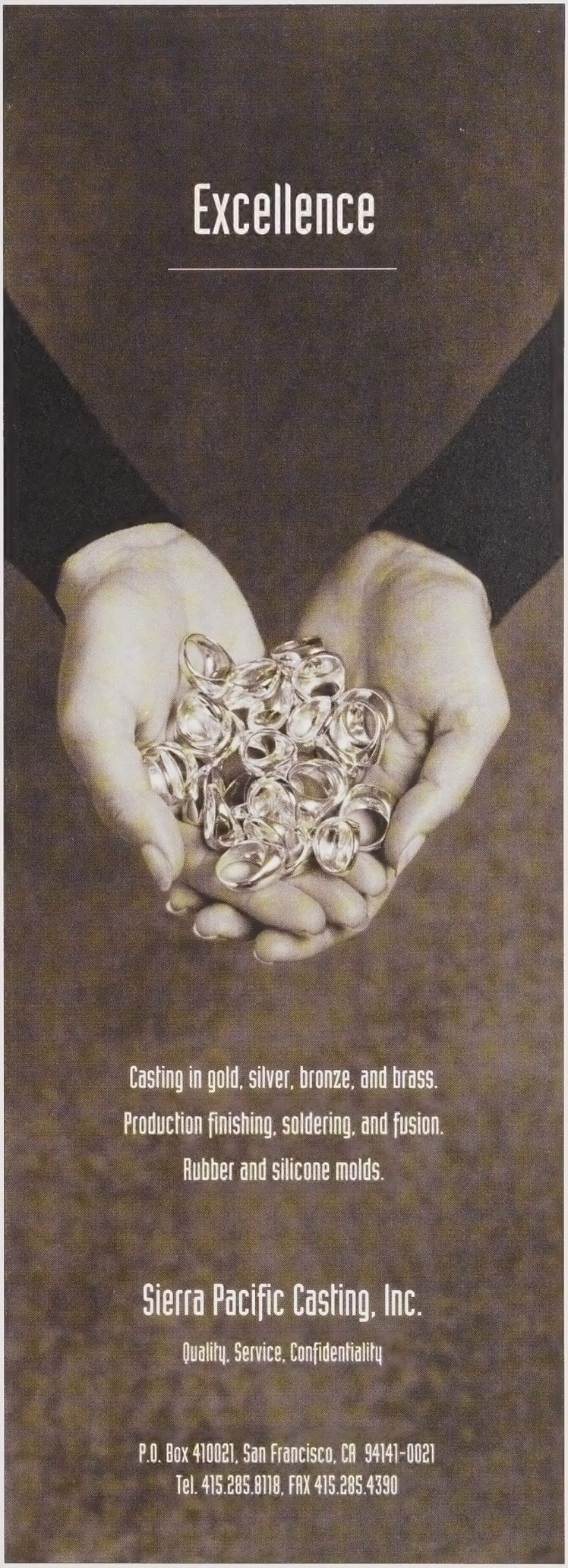
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Ellensburg funky

TEXT: MATTHEW KANGAS

Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington, is ninety miles east of Seattle across the high Cascade Mountains range and a world away from the comparatively sophisticated cultural institutions of Puget Sound. At least two local variations of art movements, Funk Art and Found Object Jewelry, got their start there or were redesigned and retrofitted to suit the needs of the students and teachers.

While Davis, California may have been the Athens of Funk, Ellensburg was its Alexandria, a willing provincial outpost with its own learned clutch of followers. The closer one looks at the oeuvres of the major post-1970 artists – Don Tompkins (1933-1982); Ken Cory (1944-1994); Merrily Tompkins (b. 1947); Nancy Worden (b. 1954); and Ed Wicklander (b. 1952) – the easier it is to realize the differences between these individuals and the California Funk artists like William T. Wiley, Robert Arneson, and Robert Hudson.

Institutionalized for the first time in a 1967 exhibition at the University Art Museum in Berkeley by director Peter Selz, the style was the subject of Selz's perplexed catalog essay, "Notes on Funk".[1] He agreed with artists who told him, "When you see it, you know it." Nevertheless, he pointed out several aspects that are pertinent to a discussion of the Ellensburg Funky style:

> Funk art is hot rather than cool...it is bizarre rather than formal...it is sensuous.[2]

LEFT
Don Tompkins
Richard Nixon (Commemorative Medals Series), 1969-72
sterling silver, brass,
synthetic stone, photograph
5/8 x 4 3/4 x 5/8"
Collection of Maryn Tompkins,
Mountlake Terrace, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick

Selz, a leading authority on twentieth-century German art, traced its attitude back to Dada and Surrealism, updated it in relation to the early work of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns to give it a fine-art sheen, but set it in opposition to Pop Art.

Moving north by northwest, Funk art became all the rage in West Coast university art schools. Its irreverence appealed to the young; its adaptability and non-hierarchical attitude about materials appealed to craft artists. From Davis to Las Vegas; from Eugene to Boise; from Corvallis to Pullman; north to Ellensburg, and even to Bozeman and Missoula, Calgary and Regina, Funk art freed regional artists from the pressures of the dominant style of the day, Modernist abstraction.

At the same time, an earlier C.W.U. professor of jewelry Ramona Solberg (b. 1921) widened the net of possible materials even farther to incorporate references to ethnic art, talismans, and amulets. According to Worden, an artist and former student at C.W.U.,

> ...what always made Central different was that we were jewelers. Don, Ken, and Ramona knew how to forge but they never taught it...They were closer to anthropology than art, more cultural, interested in how jewelry intertwines with people's lives.[3]

With that appreciative ground, artists such as Worden, Merrily Tompkins, Cory, and Wicklander combined the love of found materials with other aspects of Funk they found appealing: subjective content, sexuality, and humor.

Although there were many other teachers and artists at C.W.U. with similar affinities to Funk, a few concentrating on jewelry and metals are the subject of this essay.[4]

An extraordinary figure long neglected in American jewelry history, Don Tompkins studied art and art education at the University of Washington after a strong high-school program under Russell Day in Everett, Washington. He began graduate work in Seattle but also studied at the School for American Craftsmen in Rochester, New York and at Columbia University Teachers College where he received an Ed. D. in 1973. His dissertation dealt with historical precedents for jewelry as fine art.[5]

Strictly speaking, *Banting and Best, Jackson Pollock,* and *Richard Nixon (Commemorative Medals series)* (1969-72), are pre-Funk, more New York Pop Art. Living in Manhattan in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Tompkins was an active participant in the nascent SoHo art scene while he was a graduate student at Columbia. He owned a studio, Jewelry Loft, where he sold necklaces and pendants based on current events of the day. Other subjects commemorated were political figures like J. Edgar Hoover, Martha Mitchell, and President Theodore Roosevelt (whom Tompkins was said to resemble, hence his nickname "T.R."), musician Janis Joplin, writers Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, *Playboy* publisher Hugh Hefner, and art-world luminaries Pablo Picasso, dealer Ivan Karp, and Claes Oldenburg. These objects comprise an important body of work which satirizes American society in pendant-necklaces of great linear delicacy, impeccable composition, and withering wit.

LEFT
Merrily Tompkins
A Woman and Her Dog (Gov. Dixy Lee Ray), 1977
sterling silver, enamel, brass, wood, found objects
7 x 5 x 1"
Collection of Anne Gerber, Seattle, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick

Nearly ten years after his kid sister, Merrily, studied with him in 1968-69, she made *A Woman and Her Dog (Gov. Dixy Lee Ray)* (1977). Borrowing her brother's commemorative-medal format, Tompkins celebrated and vulgarized in true Funk fashion the state's only woman governor, Dr. Dixy Lee Ray, ex-director of the Atomic Energy Commission and blatant apologist for corporate pollution sins.

With her love of folk art (and her folk artist father) and its often unapologetically sloppy construction, the younger Tompkins chafed at the small size of jewelry and quickly moved to larger objects. Washington state's most eccentric and controversial (one-term) governor is honored in this kinetic piece. When the rabbit's foot is pulled, the silver French poodle pet wags its tail and the marine biologist-turned-politician shakes a vial of polluted water.

Later works like *The Blemish* (1985) limit metals to a hammered copper face and depend even more upon allusions to self-taught artists. More than her brother who lived in Ellensburg between 1964 and 1972, Merrily and her art remain rooted in the comfy, homey, funky side of Ellensburg, its ramshackle wooden buildings, its cowtown atmosphere, its sleepy college town mentality. With cozy junk shops and abundant roadside attractions, Ellensburg is very conducive to quiet, private fantasy.

With Don Tompkins's return to New York in 1972, Ken Cory took over the metals program. A graduate of California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, Cory arrived with a Funk sensibility ready to be adapted – or violated. Before that, he had studied jewelry under Victor Moore at Pullman High School and continued at Washington State University in the same town, studying sculpture under George Laisner.

Cory chose subjects which were erotic, both feminine and masculine. The juxtapositions of rigid geometry and floppy organic forms repeated over and over in his jewelry are a clue to this, as are his choices of materials: plastic and leather; copper and silver; hammered and stamped or smooth surfaces. A pioneer in men's jewelry, Cory was strangely hermetic and withdrawn compared to Don Tompkins, his predecessor. At the time of Cory's death, virtually his complete output was contained in a few compartmentalized suitcases. A full-scale retrospective and catalog are planned.

Again and again, Cory went far beyond the witty illustrations in his collaborations with Les LePere, the *other* Pencil Brother. The C.W.U. professor evolved an erotic vocabulary of male imagery: phalluses, auto parts, urinal traps, spark plugs, and batteries. These were executed in exquisitely intricate *feminine* techniques, however, like champlevé and cloisonné enamels (*Nancy's Buckle*, 1978). A late work like *Tent Brooch* (1988) retains all the mystery of Ellensburg Funky (insect? switch? vagina?) yet demonstrates a refined feeling for silver stamping, gold accents, and a single carnelian stone.

In 1974, 1975, and 1984, Professor Cory organized jewelry shows on campus so that budding talents like Worden could see first-hand the best work being done nationally. Among artists included were Jim Cotter, Lane Coulter, Richard Mawdsley, Gary Noffke, Linda Ross, and J. Fred Woell.

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KISSES

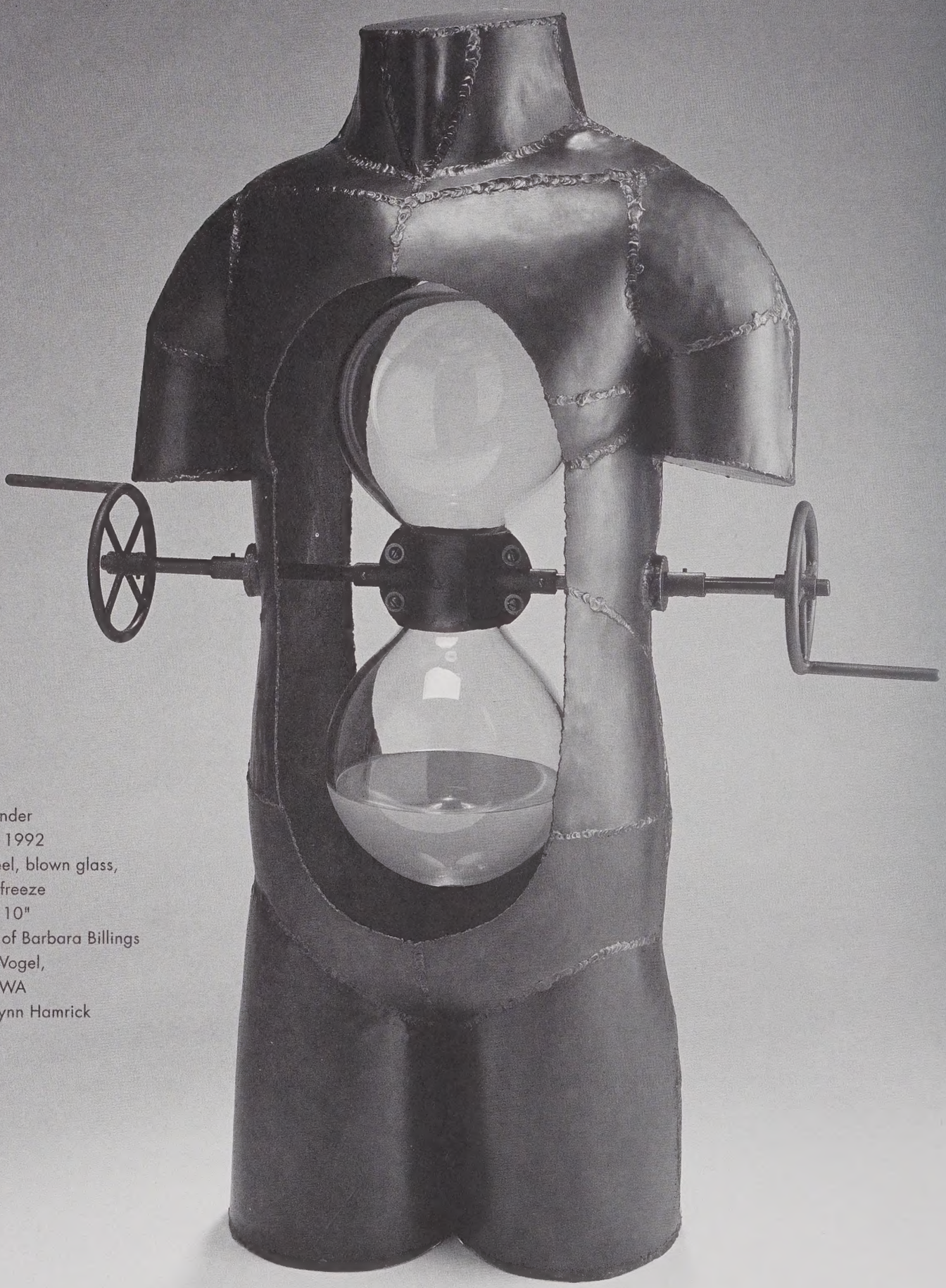
LEFT
Nancy Worden
The Seven Deadly Sins, 1994
silver, synthetic rubies,
eyeglass lenses, found objects,
cast and fabricated
Courtesy of American Craft Museum, NY
Photo by Lynn Hamrick

RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM

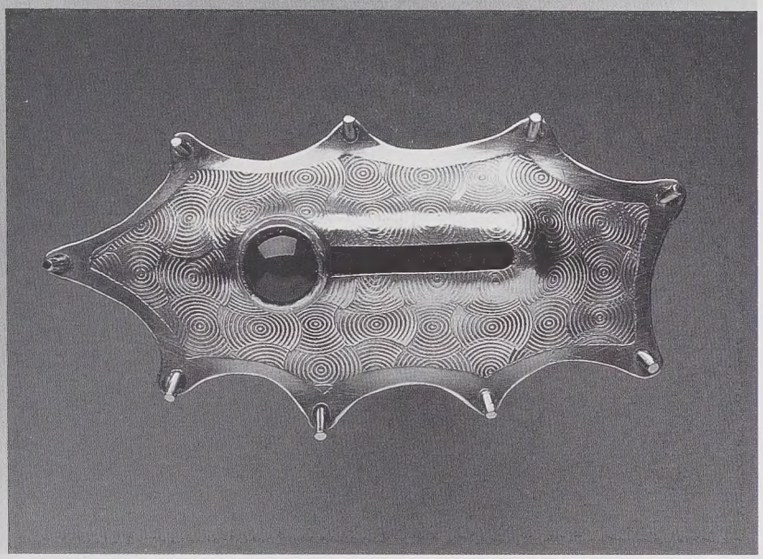
Merrily Tompkins
The Blemish, 1985
wood, copper, rope, found objects,
electric light
20 x 25½ x 6"
Collection of the artist, Seattle, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick

Don Tompkins
Banting and Best (Commemorative Medals Series), 1969-72
sterling silver, brass, found objects
4 x 5 x ⅝"
Collection of Betty Tompkins,
New York, NY
Photo by Lynn Hamrick

Ken Cory
Nancy's Buckle, 1978
silver, copper, brass, cloisonne enamel,
mirror, millefiore-style fabrication
with handmade drawplates
2 x 3 x ½"
Collection of Nancy Worden,
Seattle, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick



Ed Wicklander
Bile Torso, 1992
welded steel, blown glass,
brass, antifreeze
41 x 32 x 10"
Collection of Barbara Billings
and Ernie Vogel,
Redondo, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick



ABOVE
Ken Cory
Tent Brooch, 1988
silver, gold, carnelian, stamped, masonite dye-formed, fabricated
1 1/4 x 2 1/2 x 1/2"
Estate of the artist, Ellensburg, WA
Photo by Lynn Hamrick

Worden decided to go to the University of Georgia to study with Noffke after working under Cory, but Cory's influence has stayed with her. Though she would possibly deny it, her work, too, falls under the rubric of *Ellensburg Funky*. After all, what else could one call using a toilet bowl brush in a brooch?

Worden took to heart the loose or informal construction of Noffke, added an anti-preciousness of materials, and combined them (in ways Merrily Tompkins did not) with feminine subjects. Grateful for Cory's inspiration in the same way Merrily was indebted to her big brother, Worden commented in a letter:

> What Ken created for me was an atmosphere completely lacking in pretense or convention... Without inhibition, his imagery wallows in what a lot of men like: sex, cars, tools, being outside and getting dirty... My work looks like an American woman designed it and I want it to.[6]

Her *Initiation Necklace* (1977) with its mixing of plastic pink hair curlers, chicken bones, and copper and silver wire satirizes the tribal conformity of mall life. In that and other necklaces and brooches, Worden affectionately spoofs American rituals of beauty, mating, consuming, shopping, and romance.

Beginning her signature eyeglass-lens pieces in 1987, Worden created a series of pins both accentuating the roots of Ellensburg Funky – found objects, mixture of *good* and *bad* materials, informality of construction, and bizarre or sexual subjects – and added a crucial yet important factor: personal narrative. Acute, arcane, and rich, it is the hermetic narratives in West Coast art which is most maddening to East Coast residents, who view these artworks as self-indulgent, self-referential, and, hence, shallow and narcissistic.

Worden's later necklaces like *Broken Promises* (1992), which use U.S. currency images of politicians in a mock-Victorian necklace, extend the cynical, inside humor of the tiny college campus to the wider social world. Her *Seven Deadly Sins* (1994) touches on current events even more and distantly echoes Tompkins's *Commemorative Medals* series.

Each of the seven sins – lust, gluttony, sloth, envy, avarice, wrath, and greed – is matched with a photograph (on the back of each metal section) of a prominent culpable celebrity, respectively, Woody Allen, Elvis Presley, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Bo Derek, Leona Helmsley, Lorena Bobbit, and Imelda Marcos.

Finally, Ed Wicklander, another artist who took Ellensburg Funky further, into pedestal and free-standing mixed-media sculpture, had some salutary and insightful comments about the cowtown/college town phenomenon:

> Their sensitivity dealt with personal narratives in a three-D realm. Not only [Robert] Arneson, [William T.] Wiley, and [Robert] Hudson, but there were other influences there like Chicago artists H.C. Westermann, Jim Nutt, and Ed Paschke, along with giants like Kienholz and Duchamp.[7]

My Dad's Foundry Pin (1976) could not get much more personal. Using his father's Tacoma factory ID card, Wicklander fetishized a personal icon in close emulation of Cory. With a cast-silver crucible and silver-soldered copper and slate bricks, the foundry kiln is invoked and like the back of many Ellensburg metals, the reverse side is also deeply symbolic and visible. It shows his father's fingerprint.

Nearly twenty years later, *Bile Torso* (1992) blows up the intimate joining of Cory's and Worden's brooches into welded-steel sections comprising a headless human figure. Building perhaps on the Surrealist-inspired years of his graduate work at University of Illinois – Champaign-Urbana, *Bile Torso* nevertheless harks back to little Funkytown in eastern Washington state. Wicklander demonstrates how often, in Northwest metals, big things start out in small packages, small, enigmatic, and funny packages.

Matthew Kangas, independent Seattle art critic and curator, writes frequently on crafts.

NOTES

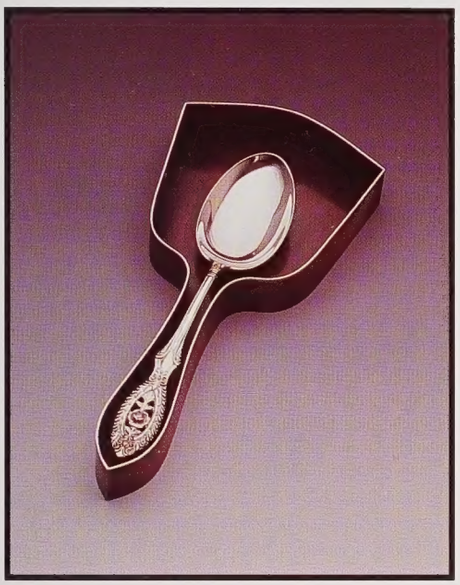
1. Peter Selz, "Notes on Funk," *Art in a Turbulent Era*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985, pp. 325-330.
2. Ibid.
3. Nancy Worden, interview with author, April 9, 1994.
4. For example: R.E. Beans, Art Detective, Mike Holmes, Gary Green, Jimmy Jet, Charlie King, Marty Lovens, Jeanette Papadopolous, and Larry Reid.
5. Donald Paul Tompkins, "Crafts, the High Arts, and Education." Dissertation for Doctorate of Education degree, Columbia University Teachers College, New York, 1973.
6. Worden interview.
7. Ed Wicklander, interview with author, May 28, 1994.

Interior Motives

DOMESTIC OBJECTS IN THE SERVICE OF CHANGE

The Work of Myra Mimlitsch Gray

TEXT: WILLIAM BARAN-MICKLE



Hand Mirror, 1993
silver, spoon, copper
9 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 1 1/4"

LEFT, TOP

Candleholder II, 1995
silver, bronze, bird's eye maple veneer
3 1/2 x 7 1/4 x 7 1/4"

LEFT, BOTTOM

Candleholder I, 1995
silver, bronze, bird's eye maple veneer
3 1/2 x 10 x 4"

Myra Mimlitsch Gray's work encompasses a broad scope of social issues brought to light by an equally broad range of styles and techniques; but none are as they normally appear. The artist's work challenges our assumptions about the things we use in everyday life. Beginning with the common exterior of teapots, spoons, creamers, trays, and watches she explores the interior lives of the objects. A spoon may be split in two and embedded in a tray, or a box structure may hint at a teapot that can not be seen. While common objects do not usually engage us in their history or customs, they do sometimes draw our interest to the aesthetics of fashion or function. Mimlitsch Gray's skills lie in her ability to question the social contexts in which these everyday objects are imbedded giving them new dimensions. And though her work is produced in several series simultaneously, they are consistent in their social content.

Mimlitsch Gray received the traditional, technical training of a gold/silversmith beginning in 1980 at the Philadelphia College of Art, followed in 1986 with a MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Though, historically, women in the metalsmithing field were involved in the polishing and chasing areas and not smithing and forging, Mimlitsch Gray became adept at the full range of smithing techniques and, thus, moved beyond the restrictive traditions that had been in force up to the mid-twentieth century. The artist learned to create splendid functional metal objects that proudly exhibited their materiality and technical finesse. However, the pursuit of perfect surfaces and clever solutions to design and function began to conflict with the artist's desire to be more expressive. While polishing metal objects for the mass market at a small silver manufacturing firm in Philadelphia, Mimlitsch Gray became aware of the ways that competently designed objects were made more marketable by revisions from the marketing department rather than the design department.[1] Gradually, Mimlitsch Gray began to look at the domestic objects themselves and to come to terms with their history, their tradition as symbols of prestige, and at how these items related to the role of women in a male-dominated culture. The works that resulted from this investigation exist largely in the context of a confluence of social issues that question class and domestic relationships, gender lines, and labor and business practices. Her materials and techniques are those of the traditional craftsperson and it is through them that she chooses to express herself within the evolving field of metalsmithing specifically, and the crafts field in general.

Ambiguous and filled with tension, Mimlitsch Gray's *Timepieces* are the first she distilled into social commentaries. Built on the concept of a metronome, these kinetic objects keep time only when worn on the body, with the passage of time being recorded by a diamond set onto a meter bar which scratches a glass surface. Formalist in style and design, they have the scale of jewelry and are reminiscent of Margaret de Patta's ground breaking jewelry of the 1940s. With their limited life spans, it is material time that is gracefully and conceptually explored. Or perhaps it is a time that records the consequence of human actions as materialized through the movement of the wearer.

Mimlitsch Gray's hollowware series is one of her most challenging. Layer upon layer of visual experience is coupled with the social and domestic resonance of the chosen objects. In this series, salt cellars, bowls, teapots, and decanters are enclosed in both plain, nondescript boxy structures or in slightly curvilinear fabrications. Some of the encased vessels are found objects produced by industry, while others are reproductions of traditional vessels handmade by the artist. Each vessel is divided (sliced) in either halves or in variously sized segments. The viewer is left with a silhouette of a common object which flattens the representation. The encasement denies an ordinary visual experience of viewing the convex surfaces of volumetric form, and exhibits instead the recessed spaces of the interior of the containers. One comes to know such common vessels for the first time by their interior reality.

The encased *Decanters* and *Salt Cellars* are halved. When closed, the exterior silhouette shape is curvy and sensual; when opened the interior of the vessel is revealed and again one sees the original form and recognizes it by its silhouette and inner dimensions. The womb-like interior is a metaphor for *everywoman*. The decanters are handmade replicas of late 19th Century American wine goblets. The artist recalls the late Victorian Period, with its mixed messages and eclectic tastes, to comment on the roles women played in service to men: domestic servants, moral exemplars, Mothers, and paeans to chastity. Foregrounding the interior of the vessel, Mimlitsch Gray seeks to symbolize woman's inner being rather than accept the traditional prescriptions based only on her status and social roles.

The *Encased Teapots* are solid boxy forms with two or three small openings created by the tight cut of the surrounding encasement which slices through portions of the spout, handle, and lid. Through these narrow, sensuous openings, viewers can only peek into the vessels' interiors and see their bright and shiny silver linings. These very formal, almost minimalist objects depend on visual deprivation. By denying access to the form they tantalize viewers to speculate about the actual sensually suggestive shapes within. Through this subtle and ambiguous sexuality, the artist engenders a new level of inquiry.

In *Encased Teapot*, 1991 Mimlitsch Gray takes a manufactured teapot and places it inside a handmade oval box. She highlights the contrast between the austere design of a traditional Shaker object and the sumptuous shape of the teapot and the industrial processes which mass produced it and so many other duplicate forms. The *Salt Cellars* reflect the process of their manufacture as mold-made, machine-punched volumes. In standard industrially-produced cellars, the separate halves are joined during manufacture. Mimlitsch Gray presents both mold and form to the viewers. These positive and negative shapes force a consideration of both the production process and the traditional use of such containers.

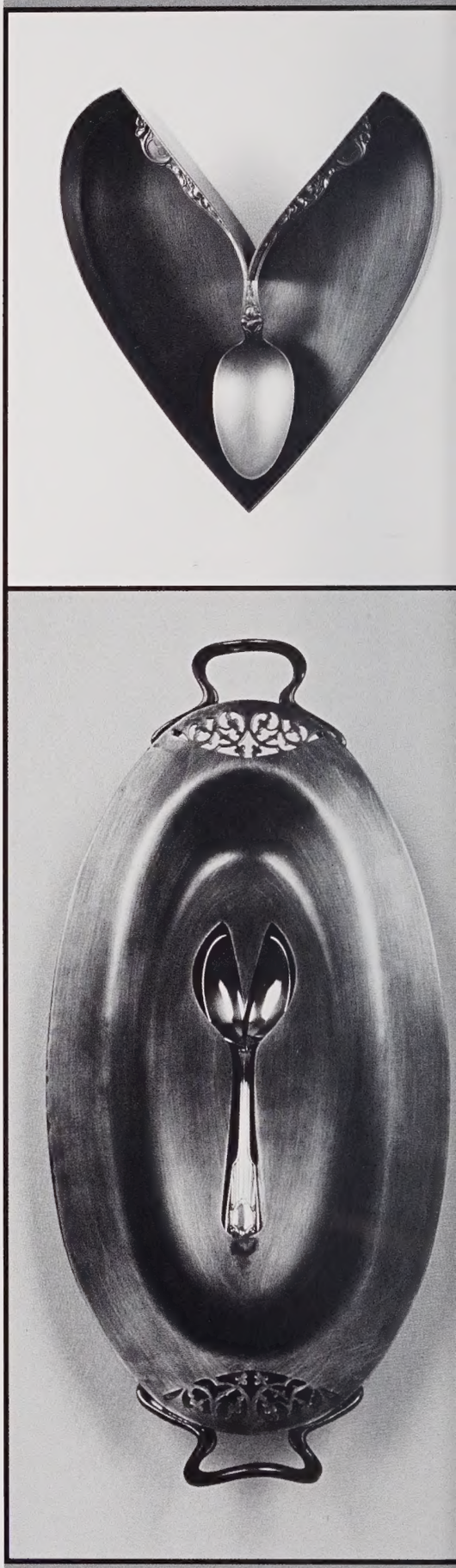
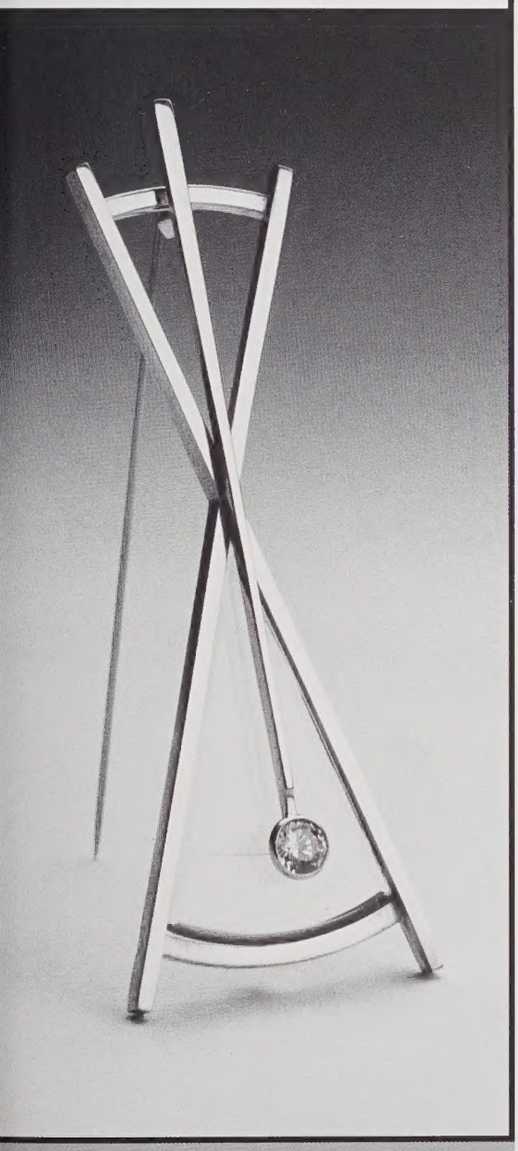


Plate Study # 1, 1993
silver spoon, copper, found object
14¼ x 6¼ x 3"
Photo: Courtesy, Adair Margo Gallery, El Paso, Texas

Pair of Spoons, 1992
silver, copper, spoons
6 x 5 x 1½" each
Photo: Larry Erickson



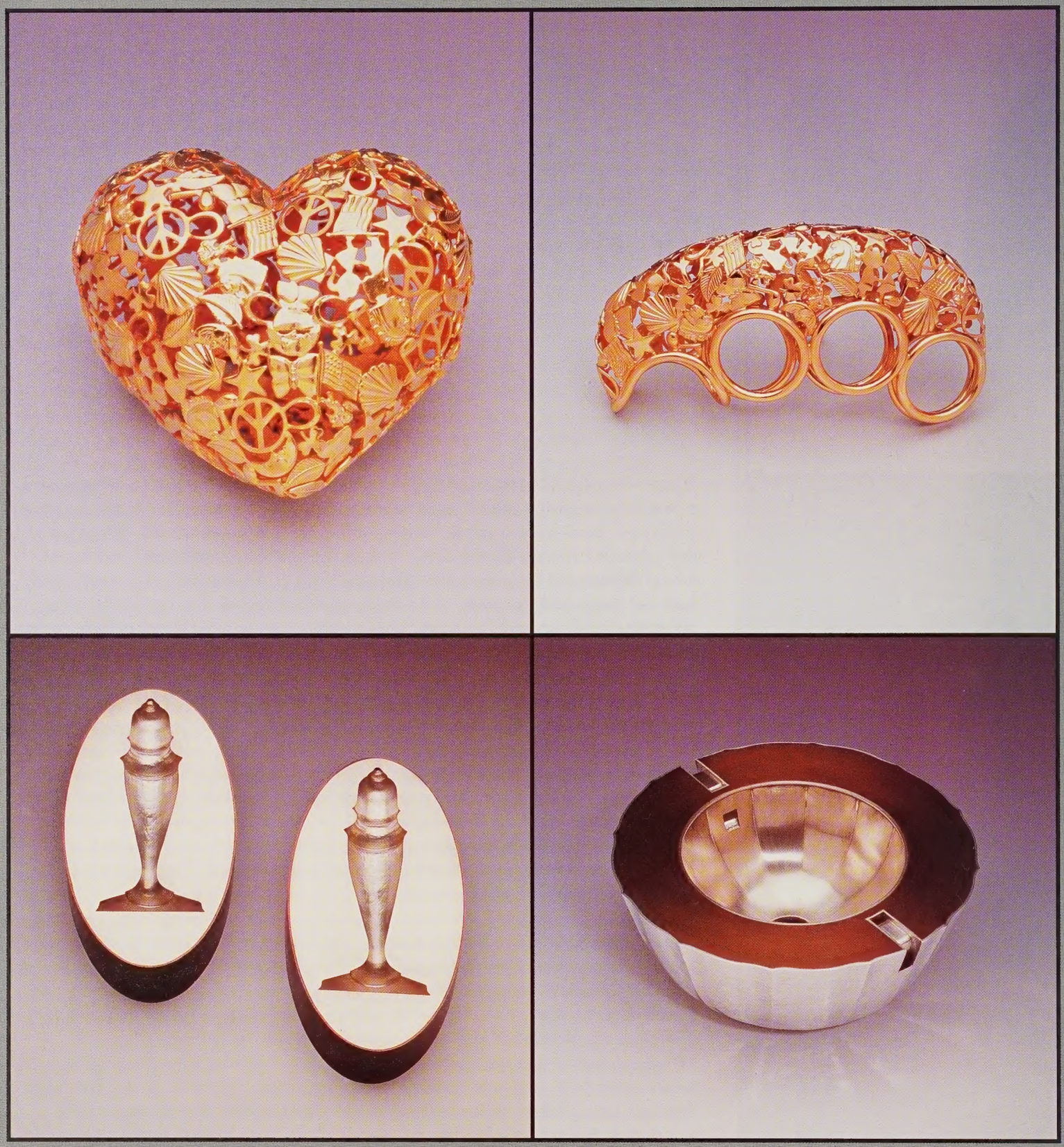
Timepiece, 1988
silver, stainless, glass, c. zirconia
3¼ x 1¼ x ¼"
Collection: J. Falino

Presentation Triad is Mimlitsch Gray's quintessential vessel form. It is, in her eyes, a Tea Service, with a teapot, creamer and sugar. Their exterior forms are polygonal solids, yet, none have a spout, handle, or lid, nor are they encased. This set is the volumetric representation of the interior voids of these traditional, functional forms. As with the *Decanters,* the artist has given us an unexpected interior, solidified and faceted like a jewel. In addition, an almost obsessive application of felt pads, commonly used to protect table surfaces, covers the forms at their corners, so that no matter how the pieces are put down, no scuff will be made. This protection implies use, even though the tea and coffee services of today, particularly those made of precious metals, are rarely used. Instead, they tend to be for display as markers of status, wealth, and class.

The artist continues her investigations in a series of spoons, which have taken three forms. She has produced spoons as jewelry, embedded in plates, and in her familiar encasements. All three isolate only the spoon, knives and forks have not been treated. Mimlitsch Gray remarks upon her choice of flatware by saying, "The spoon is a sensuous form. It's both phallic and vaginal. I'm playing with its sexual identity and its innate romance."[2]

Typically, the spoons are highly polished, yet split open, bent backward, and gracefully contorted. They are metaphors for women who contort themselves trying to fulfill the duties imposed by society. The bold, bifurcated spoons are presented as still lives, or, lives stilled. They are solemn, quiet, strong, and aesthetically elegant. Indeed, Mimlitsch Gray refers to these forms as "portraiture".[3]

Issues concerning domestic roles are further explored in shadow boxes. The artist does not just call to mind the table as social setting; rather, her arrangements incorporate the special cloth sheaths and storage boxes used to house silver tableware when it is not being used. The elaborateness of these storage structures directly raises issues of wealth and prestige. One piece uses a box-like form in the silhouette shape of a hand mirror. The spoon is centered with the concave surface of the bowl occupying the same location where a face would be reflected.



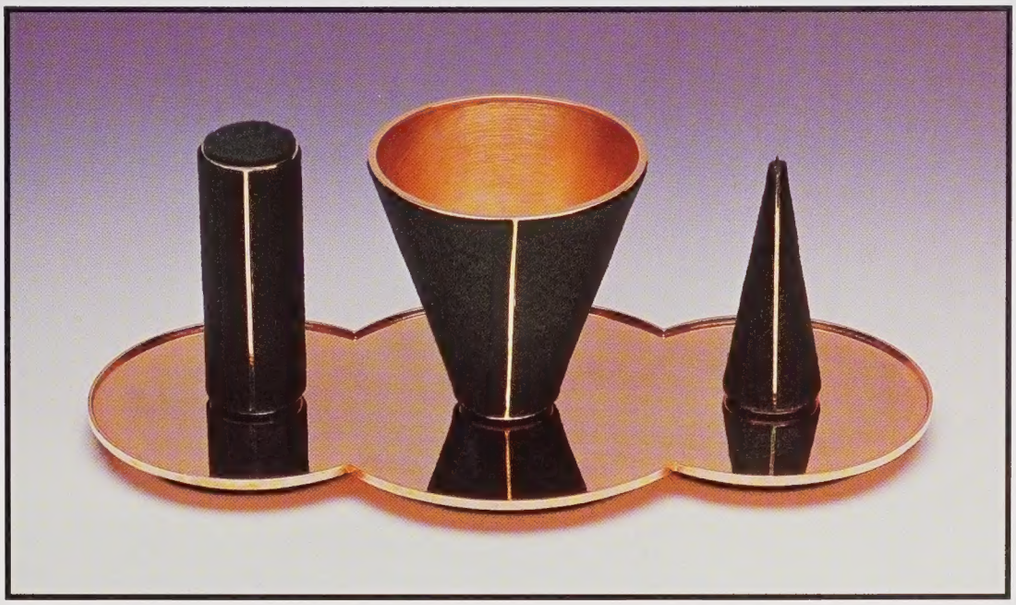
TOP LEFT
Purge, 1993
gold-plated brass charms
3 x 3 x 2"

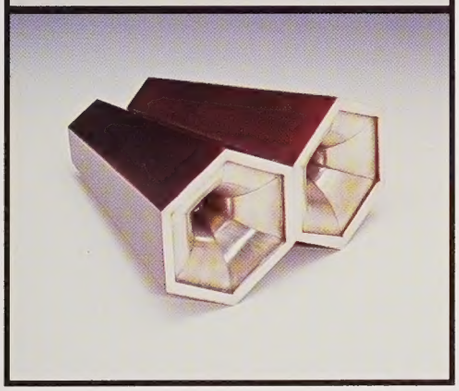
TOP RIGHT
Ring II, 1993
gold-plated brass, charms
4 x 2 x 1"

BOTTOM LEFT
Salt Cellars, 1991
silver, copper
7 x 4 x 1½"

BOTTOM RIGHT
Encased Sugar Bowl, 1994
silver, copper, found object
2½ x 6 x 6"

RIGHT
Vanity, 1994
24k gold-plated brass,
copper, silver
10 x 5 x 4"





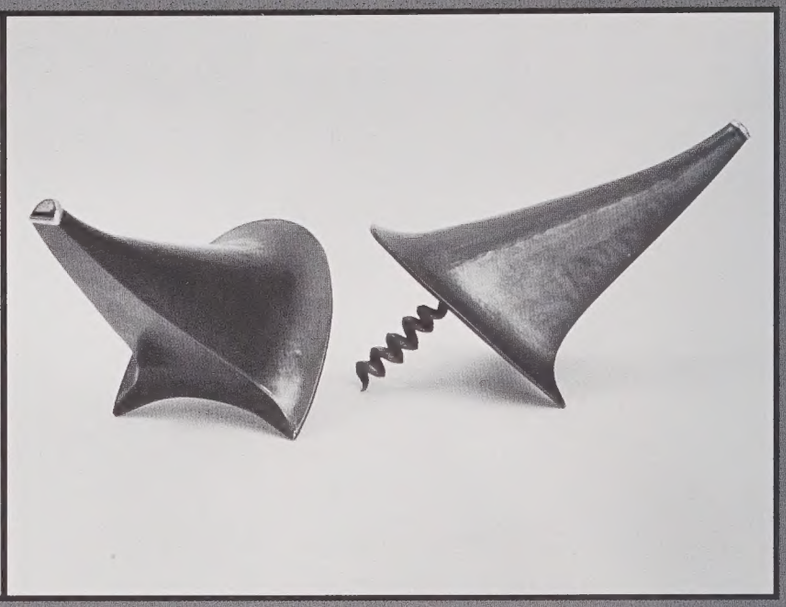
TOP
Trowel, 1994
silver, spoon, copper
7 x 3 x 1"

ABOVE
Encased Candlesticks, 1994
copper, silver, found objects
5 x 9 x 7½"

Isolated pieces focus on a particular subject and can be quite Dadaesque in nature, taking a revealing and yet defiant tone, as compared to the relative simplicity and elegance of the work in series. One such object is *Heels*. Deceptively simple, this piece is layered with histories and innuendoes that engage questions of gender conditions in the late twentieth century. Two stiletto heels lay together with corkscrews jutting out from the surface where the heel would normally adjoin the sole. Semi-precious stones are set at the tip of each heel. Perhaps a screw is needed to keep the impossibly tilted appendages attached, or one could unscrew them and take them off the shoe. Mimlitsch Gray may be saying that a woman may be feminine in heels, if she wishes, but that they do not describe or define her, that she is now free to take her rightful place on the level ground, off the unrealistic pedestal of shallow praise and social expectation.

Many of the artist's isolated works resemble what the art historian and critic, Suzi Gablik, described in her book, *Has Modern Art Failed?* as "anxious objects", a term she credits to critic Harold Rosenberg. Gablik writes: "Faced with an anxious object, we are usually challenged, and may even find ourselves baffled, disturbed, bewildered, angered, or just plain bored. The difficulty is to discover why this is art, or even if it is art."[4] As many of Mimlitsch Gray's artworks inhabit this territory, it is tempting to associate them with ready-mades and see them as merely contributing to the category of works influenced by Man Ray, Fluxus, Dada, etceteras. However, it is important to note that Duchamp changed the objects he found (or selected) very little, where Mimlitsch Gray dramatically alters her objects, or actually fabricates them in metal. More to the point, however, is how the artist's personal involvement in her objects reflects a craftsperson's love of manipulating materials by hand, thus endowing the resulting object with a humanness gained from touch.

According to Gablik, most, if not all modern art movements over the past one hundred years were in reaction to a previous artistic practice. This continual assault on the past has left us no tradition to rally against; we are left only with ourselves. Mimlitsch Gray is fulfilling a promise of modernism in perhaps the only way left. As Gablik states: "the only legitimate strategy left to produce art in a Modernist mode is to use personal vision in order to deal with social responsibility."[5]



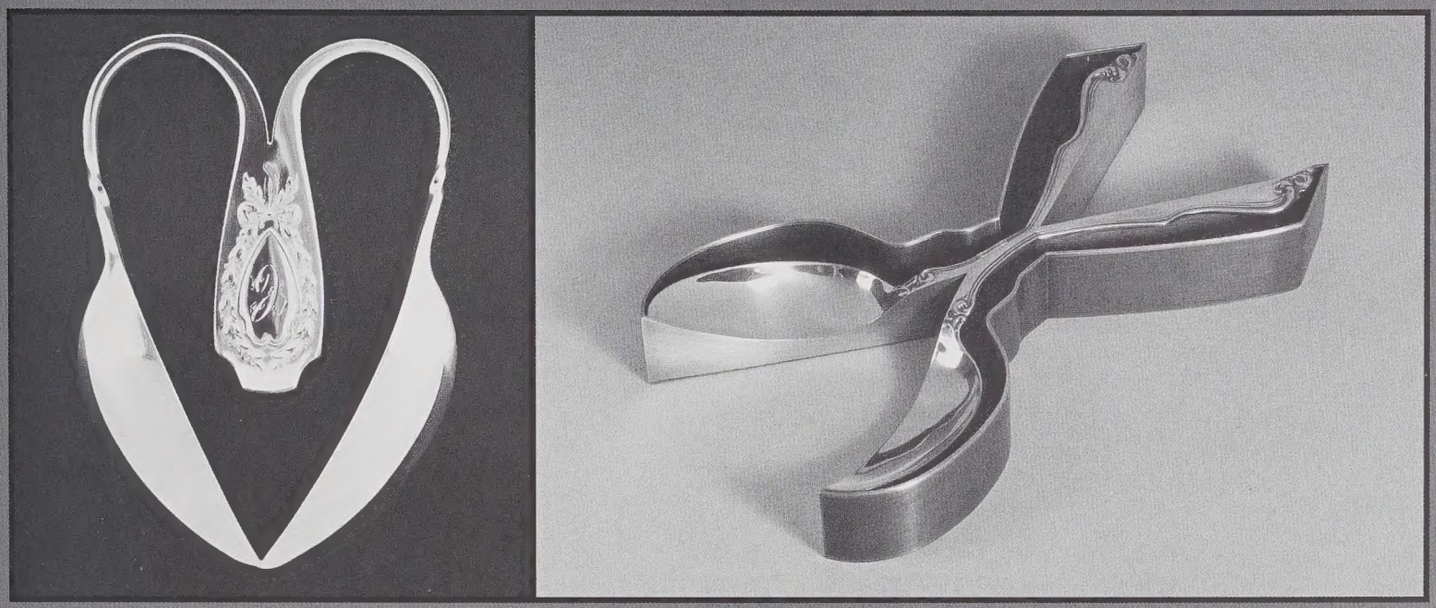
Painters and sculptors have pursued their personal vision and questioned the traditions of their media for centuries, but it has been the rare craftsperson who has challenges the tenets of her or his field. As craftspeople increasingly break traditional boundaries and explore personal and social issues, the rigid definitions of *art* and *craft* are blurred, creating a dialogue between fine arts and crafts. Mimlitsch Gray's work serves as an excellent illustration of the work of a craftsperson engaged in social commentary and artistic exploration and collapsing the boundary between art and craft.

One of the strongest emotions the artist evokes through her objects is that of sentimentality. When this emotion is in play, contradictions seem invisible or unimportant as the viewer's response is primarily pleasureful. This is because some amount of myth and magic are at work. Why else would Victorian lives and lifestyles be so popular today? It is big business to encourage people to imagine living as in a romantic past, dressing up and playing the role of a Victorian, as witnessed by magazines devoted to a sentimental version of Victorian life. Yet, looking through this masquerade one may question how those estate lawns were so well maintained, how afternoon tea just appeared so magically at poetically gorgeous table settings, or how some could enjoy the weekdays while others labored in factories or in other countries to export the best of their material and labor. Mimlitsch Gray's use of objects that recall sentimentality is purposeful, as it lures viewers in and then hopes to redirect them into asking deeper questions as to how the world really works and what issues are really at stake.

Mimlitsch Gray evokes and mimics the 1970s when she uses found spoons as jewelry. During that period, sterling flatware was cut and bent into rings and bracelets; though, her heart shaped spoon and neckpiece, for instance, are almost too lovely to be thought of as part of that heritage. Aside from nostalgia, the artist's use of sentiment is more fully, even blatantly realized with the brief, concurrent series which she refers to as *Baubles*. The large heart-shaped *Purge* and *Ring II*, are tight, hollow constructions of tiny profiles of stars, horses, moons, and flags, all mass-produced in brass. Mimlitsch Gray refers to these as "images of Americana". Gold-plating creates a more precious object, imbuing a cute item with a *deeper* beauty. Yet, the beautiful heart, which would be perfect for Valentine's day or Mother's Day, is too large to be wearable, and it has no pin-back either, which diminishes the possibility of wearing this token of affection.

LEFT
Decanters, 1990
copper
8 x 5 x 2½"
Photo: Larry Erickson

ABOVE
Heels, 1989
copper, bronze, silver, garnets
3 x 4¾ x 3"



ABOVE
Altered Spoon, 1992
found silver spoon
3¼ x 2¼ x ½"
Photo: Larry Erickson
Collection:
Malcolm and Susan Knapp

RIGHT
Scissors, 1994
silver, spoon, copper
8 x 5 x 1½"
Photo: Myra Mimlitsch Gray

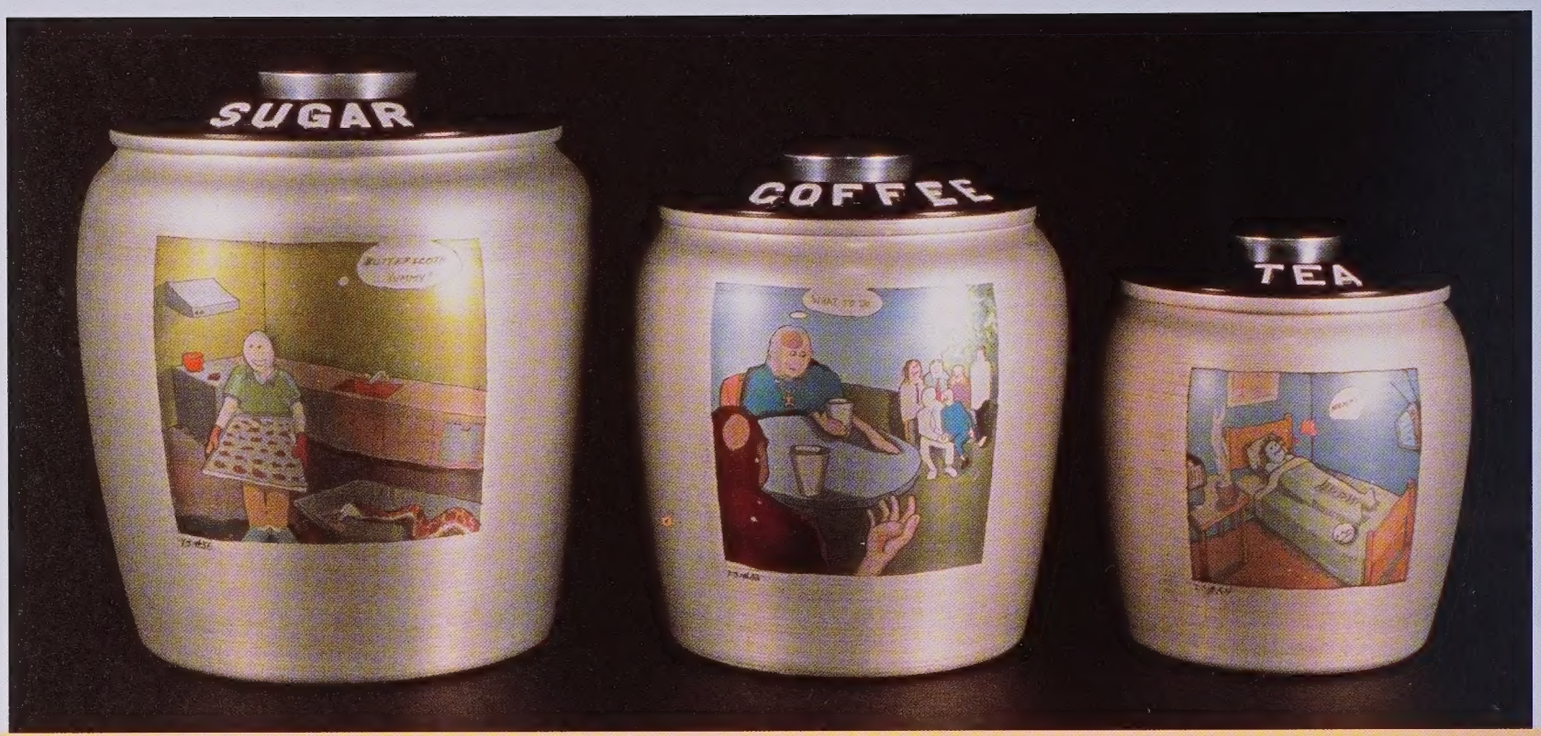
Ring II similarly captures the shallow beauty of *Purge*, but its shape is that of brass-knuckles. The elegant (gold-plated) form and gold-plated kitsch looks like Beverly Hills chic meets L. A. street reality. Although the image is one of power and implied pain, the reality of this ring is one of futility. Mimlitsch Gray has only constructed the hollow form; if used for aggression the object would collapse. It is therefore simply fashion, offering safety based upon appearance or image. Perhaps the artist is relating, through these *Baubles*, that the American dream, however wonderful in its complexity, promise, and potential, is, in fact, more fragile and delicate than perceived. And, given the extremes to which Americans are prone, from overeating oat bran to buying $200 sneakers, the *dream*, if tested too far, may collapse. Through these pieces we can see how Mimlitsch Gray's work operates on several levels simultaneously, exhibiting qualities that are at the same time intellectual and emotional while reflecting an obsessiveness prevalent in the 1990s.

In the artist's own words, her work "comments on the trivial, questions commercially generated symbols, and simultaneously celebrates the feminine, the sentimental and the craft"[6].

William Baran-Mickle is a metalsmith and writer, who resides in upstate New York. He is a frequent contributor to Metalsmith.

Notes

1. Personal information and quotes not otherwise cited specifically are drawn from conversations between the artist and author which took place during May of 1994.
2. Lilian Price, "When is a Chalice not a Chalice?" *Arts Indiana*, February, 1993, 26.
3. From a letter to the author by the artist, February 12, 1994.
4. Gablik, Suzi, *Has Modernism Failed?*, 1984. 36.
5. Ibid, 128
6. Loc. Cit. Mimlitsch Gray's letter.



Observations Thrift Store Art David Clifford

ABOVE
Tea, Coffee, Sugar, 1994
engraved, anodized aluminum,
found containers
5 dia x 6", 7 dia x 9", 9 dia x 11"

LEFT
Mentor, Friend, Father, 1994
engraved, anodized aluminum,
found container
6 dia x 12"

RIGHT
Cough-fee, 1995
engraved, anodized aluminum,
found container
8 x 12"

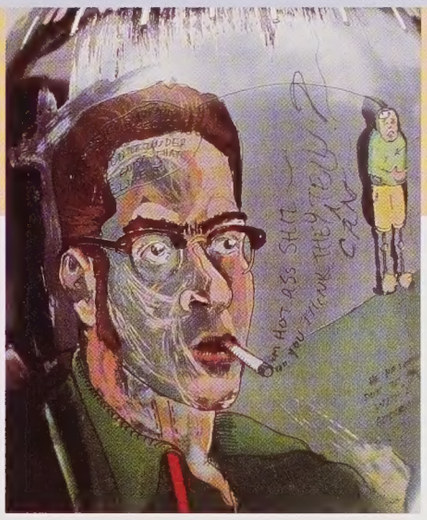
FAR RIGHT, TOP
Cough-fee, 1995 (detail)

FAR RIGHT, BOTTOM
May you lie, cheat, and swear
Cheat the Devil,
Swear by our friends
and lie with the one you love", 1994
etched and anodized portrait of my Grandfather, H.H. Clifford on aluminum placed in St. Vincent De Paul Thrift Store, Oakland, CA

David Clifford, a recent graduate of California College of Arts and Crafts, has added a new twist to recycling. Seeking a different kind of interaction than the normal art experience encountered in a gallery, Clifford started mounting his lithographs and linocuts in frames purchased in thrift stores, and then re-hanging the prints back in a thrift store ("next to other frames, kitten or Jesus decoupages, and bric-a-brac"). The prints can then be bought for the same price as the original frame. Clifford says that all of them sell within two or three days.

On learning how to anodize aluminum, Clifford extended his process into the realm of household objects. He purchases a second-hand aluminum article like a cup, saucepan, or a coffee container, and then anodizes an elaborate narrative scene on it. Usually, the subject matter is autobiographical. For instance, on *Cough-fee*, a revitalized coffee pot, Clifford depicted a narrative about the smokers in his family, and some of the rationalizations he uses to justify his own smoking habit. After he photographs the finished work, he sneaks it back onto the thrift store shelves. The object also contains a self-addressed stamped envelope, which Clifford hopes will encourage the buyer to respond with his or her opinions about the artwork. However, feedback from the marketplace has been disappointing so far.

Because the process is completed only after the original metalwork is sold, Clifford cannot exhibit objects in a gallery setting. Instead, he can only show photographs. Thus, the usual expectation of gallery-goers is inverted: the art audience gets the cheap imitation, while the thrift store shoppers get the real thing.

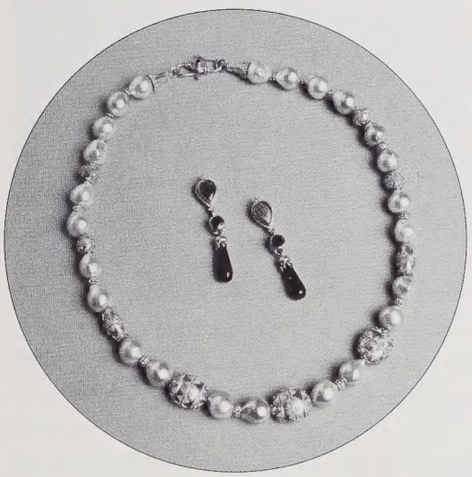


The Meaningful Significance of Craft and Decoration in Metalsmithing Today

KNOW FIRST, WHO YOU ARE; AND THEN ADORN YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

- EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES 3.1

Text: Elizabeth Jones



ABOVE
Matt Bleything
Necklace
silver, pearls, 22k granulated beads, ruby clasp
Earrings
ammonite, sunstone amber, 24k, 14k

LEFT
Pat Flynn
Iris Vase, 1992
pewter, sterling, 18k
12 x 6 x 6"

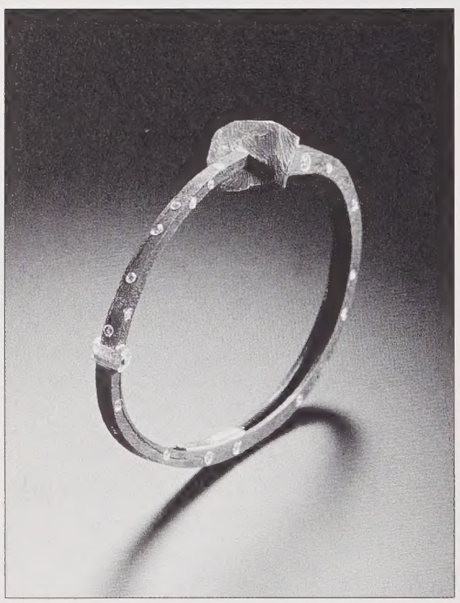
In a recent *Metalsmith* article entitled "The Future Perfect: Activism and Advocacy" (Spring, 1994), Kathleen Browne offered some thought provoking challenges to metalsmith audiences. She wrote about feeling "disenfranchised and marginalized by the art world in general" although hoping "that there is no one who still believes that metalsmithing will someday be recognized as *fine art*". She suggested solutions to this problem by demanding a more serious critical response to the artwork of metalsmiths, both through interpretive reviews and historical documentation through books and university courses. In recognizing the limitations of future teaching careers for her students, she questioned the possibilities of success for them in the commercial world where "concept or content based [work] has little financial viability". Yet, she refused "to succumb to a purely trade school mentality" and demands that her students "produce work that focuses on content; that has social, political, or personal relevance". She pleaded for support in developing "a marketplace that will support work beyond the simply decorative".

Although I am in agreement with Browne that there should be opportunities for diverse approaches in metalsmithing, I am disturbed by the underlying tone of her message. I believe she voices a common prejudice among academics that *simply decorative* work is inferior to idea-oriented work. This prejudice includes a disdain of precious materials and pure design. It also casts doubts on the validity of the vast majority of historical metalsmithing practices. Does Browne's drive to promote concept and narrative work mean that *simply decorative* work lacks narrative and meaning? On the contrary, I argue that decorative work, precisely because of its form, is significant beyond form.

In a move from the trade school or workshop to the academy at the Bauhaus (1919) and the Russian Vkhutemus (1918), metalsmithing achieved a certain recognition. Yet, metalsmiths today still complain that their field does not receive the same respect as the so-called fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. It could be argued that Gropius did not intend to raise the crafts to the level of fine arts, rather he hoped to infuse craft into the fine arts through its close association. True, he was committed to the concepts of restoring utility to art and, thereby, restoring art to the people, but, the products of the Bauhaus, more often than not, subverted the utilitarian in favor of aesthetic form. The aesthetic, yet non-functional building, chair, or teapot is restored to the public by its familiar association with utilitarian objects. Once the public tries to use the building , chair, or teapot, however, they quickly learn those objects are aesthetic representations just as non-useful as a painted building, chair, or teapot.

Aristotle's distinction between the arts and the crafts established the distinction between the useful arts and art-for-art's-sake. Plato, by the way, never made such a distinction, believing all arts to be useful for good or bad. Aristotle praised art when it functioned, beyond politics and religion, for itself alone. Immanual Kant followed Aristotle with a systematic justification for art-for-art's-sake in the eighteenth century. Crafts always subservient to utilitarian purposes are therefore, secondary to pure art-for-art's-sake art. The Bauhaus appeared to raise crafts to the level of art-for-art's sake. By disabling its usefulness, the metalsmith may hope to raise his/her jewelry to the level of sculpture, thereby assuring him/herself a place among the fine arts. In depriving their works of function they may join ranks with the fine arts which, in the words of Kant, are "purposefully purposeless".

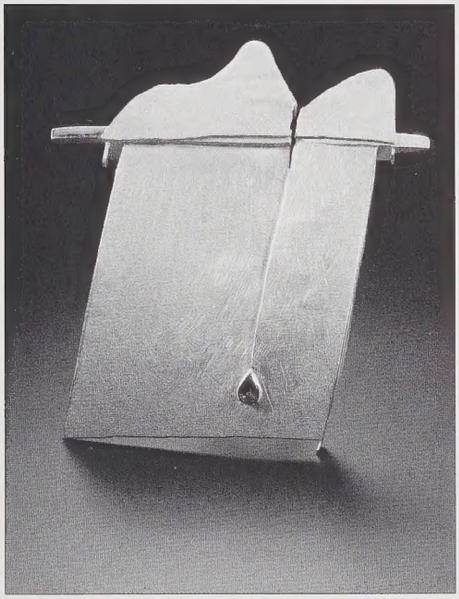
Many academic metalsmiths survive only on the reputations they earn in exhibitions. As a commercial jeweler once told me, academic metalsmithing is the "land of brooches". Jewelry as pinned-on, small-scale sculpture aspires to be fine art just as a Rietveld, DeStijl chair pretends to be craft. So-called concept or narrative jewelry is designed more to be exhibited than it is to be worn. The designs are often so uncomfortable or so awkward that no one would want to wear them. Co-extensive with this attitude that metalwork should be useless are the academic prejudices against precious materials, aesthetic concerns of beauty, and commercial use. Non-precious materials, such as those used by the Bauhaus for mass production, now seem to dominate academic designs. The origin of this attitude derives from revolutionary Marxist ideas which protested against the bourgeois who alone could afford expensive jewelry. On the other hand, purely aesthetic concerns are useful for the commercial gallery system. Beautiful form can be appreciated regardless of its inherent meaning, much of which is lost in the work's divorce from its own culture or place. Conversely, the appreciation of concept or narrative work depends on the shared cultural values of its audience.



Pat Flynn
Bracelet, 1993
iron, gold platinum,
diamond, 18k
2 1/4 x 2 3/4 x 1/2"

Many fine artists have a love-hate relationship with the gallery system: Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em. The academic metalsmith depends much less on the gallery system. The choice to teach rather than to compete in the business world gives the academic artist freedom of expression but it also forces the artist into isolation from the *people.* After all, art made for commercial galleries is art made for the people who sustain and relate to the art. Money is more than exchange value; it is also a qualitative signifier of the meaningfulness of the objects purchased by the people. Twentieth century artists struggle constantly with the dilemma of who should be the rightful owner of art, the people or the art elite. Art for the people implies mediocrity, as Nietzsche said, art with a "herd" mentality. On the other hand, art for the elite is marginalized and impotent. Academics tend to favor the latter camp. Paradoxically however, the artists whom we admire most are those who develop a successful relationship with a buying public. Cash means more than a jury's acceptance; it represents a commitment to the artwork. Carter Ratcliff confirms this idea by saying: "I believe that our persistent habit of trying to separate market value from esthetic value is misguided.... They are simply not separate things.... The esthetic is an aspect of the economic, as the economic is an aspect of the esthetic.... artworks are commodities."[1]

The anti-aesthetic tendency in academia coincides with an anti-decorative feeling as well. *Meaningful* artwork must be conceptually based rather than simply *decorative.* The purely decorative goes in and out of favor as do the people and the elite who promote it. Gropius and Le Courbusier abandoned decoration because it represented "wasted labor". Decoration meant exploitation. Accessible art must be low cost and, therefore, plain. To the Bauhaus plainness meant simple geometric forms which also, conveniently, were thought to represent universal symbols understandable to all. Take away self expression, in the guise of elaborate decorative form, and you produce art for everybody. But art for everybody sits uncomfortably close to art for nobody. Thus, Postmodern artists have swung away from the cool geometry of the Modernists towards art that has social, political, or personal relevance. The postmodernist see the politically motivated Bauhaus design as *simply decoration.* It depends on one's perspective.



TOP
Matt Bleything
Pendant
Tanzanite diamonds,
14k white gold

ABOVE
Pat Flynn
Brooch
18k, platinum, ruby
2 x 1 3/4 x 1/4"

Political form becomes decorative when its significance is lost. Likewise, the decorative becomes meaningful when its significance is understood. The understanding of the decorative, however, is not always at a conscious level. The decorative often bypasses the conceptual and appeals directly to an almost subconscious level of recognition. The decorative doesn't tell a story, it *is* the story. Otherwise indistinguishable human beings achieve distinction more immediately by the way they decorate themselves than by their deeds. Frances Borel recognizes that: "The body is not a product of nature, but of culture.... The organism is acceptable only when it is transformed, covered with signs. The body only speaks if it is dressed in artifices."[2] The body only becomes individualized through decoration. Social and political significance originates in the power struggles of individuation, both collectively and individually. Decoration is the most fundamental sign of individuation and identity. Meaning is inherent in decoration. Decoration is significant: socially, politically, personally.

Thus the following are emphasized in academia: non-usefulness and art-for-art's-sake at the fine art level, exhibition values versus commercial sales values, a rejection of precious materials and pure aesthetic concerns of beauty, and, finally, a preference for concept oriented work as opposed to primarily decorative work. One might also add there is an emphasis on self expression rather than on tribal, collective expression, in other words, an emphasis on originality.

This academic/fine art dynamic needs to be examined. It seems that traditional metalsmithing offers some important models for rejuvenating the fine arts. Just as Gropius allied fine arts with the crafts in order to restore craftsmanship to fine art, today's fine arts might find valuable lessons in traditional, commercial, decorative metalsmithing.

G.W.F. Hegel stated in the nineteenth century that fine art no longer functions as the place that embodies the god or truth, and therefore, art as a meaningful form of discourse is dead. Since fine art divorced itself from a functioning/useful role in society in order to be pure and in order to be commercially malleable, values such as originality have become more important. In a capitalist system which tolerates individual expression as long as it does not contradict the autonomy of the productive system fine art has become marginalized. Those who care about art know that, for the vast majority, art plays no active role in their lives. Thus, it is questionable that the crafts should try to emulate the fine arts in the first place. On the contrary, the crafts command a more central place in people's lives because they *are* useful and economically accessible. For many, the crafts are also meaningful as well as decorative.

Jewelry especially takes the lead as the most valued craft. The works of Matt Bleything and Pat Flynn illustrate this analysis because their work represents many of the best qualities that craft may offer as models for the fine arts. The work is commercially viable, fully supporting the artists. Bleything and Flynn produce both one-of-a- kind creations and designs for production. Bleything utilizes high karat gold and precious gems in his works while Flynn combines precious stones with precious metals and unexpected metals such as iron. Both artists respond to historical models as well as original impulses. Their prices range from the inexpensive, in the low hundreds, to the more expensive in the thousands. The inherent qualities of the materials often dictate the direction of the designs. Although both artists produce for the market, they always reserve time to make pieces that appeal to their own aesthetic sense. The quality is high and, therefore, with time, even unique and expensive creations find homes among discriminating buyers. Bleything's work is made for wearing, not exhibition. He keeps no photographic records of his work. For this artist the people who buy, wear, and cherish his work testify to its meaning and value far more eloquently than a photograph or an exhibition.

RIGHT
Matt Bleything
Pin/Pendant
Horse agate cameo, pearl, diamond, ruby, 14k
Earrings
Swan agate cameos, pearls, diamonds, blue topaz, 14k

Traditionally, jewelry played an important role in people's lives as magical fetishes imbued with protective powers. Although that meaning is rarely accepted today, precious jewelry still symbolically represents the safety conferred by economic success. Expensive ornament wins social respect; people value precious materials. Fine jewelry, especially among relatively poor peoples, remains the most valued heirloom to be passed from generation to generation. The materials themselves, unlike fine art materials, have a permanence throughout time. As in earlier times, jewelry still functions ritualistically. The crown jewels represent the sovereign of a people; a wedding ring, the bonding of two people; a watch, twenty years of loyalty. More than any other gift, fine jewelry, attests to love, loyalty, friendship, and power. Life passages such as anniversaries, birthdays, and graduations are signified by fine jewelry. Jewelry also acquires value through its association with people, especially, loved ones. The Chinese prize jade ornaments because they absorb the bodily oils of their owners, gaining a human essence and increasing in value with time and use. The gods may be embodied in fine art, but humanity inhabits jewelry. Fine art may bring higher prices and achieve a more respected position among the elite, but precious ornament is more universally owned and appreciated.

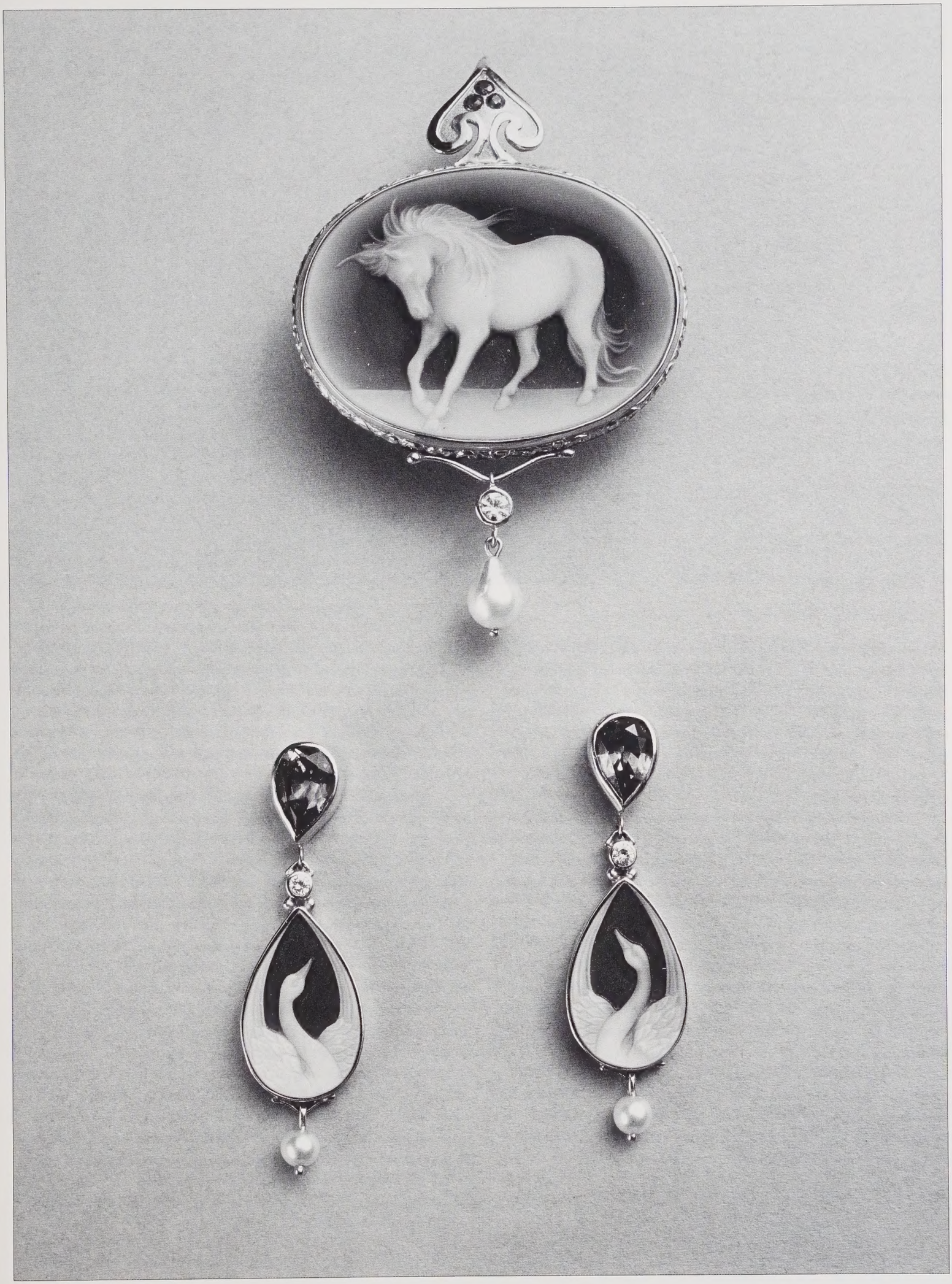
The nineteenth century art critic Theophile Gautier noted that: "The ideal disturbs even the roughest nature, and the taste for ornamentation distinguishes the intelligent being from the beast more exactly than anything else. Indeed, dogs have never dreamed of putting on earrings."[3] Not only does ornamentation distinguish man from man, it provides the visual bond that represents the tribe. Many Postmodern artists have rejected the concept of originality as a bourgeois idea separating the artist as genius from the *hoi polloi.* Feminist and Marxist theories have questioned this separatist, elitist idea. Early in the nineteenth century Wilhelm Worringer analyzed the psychological basis for abstract or decorative art, which is pertinent even today: "...the urge to abstraction is the outcome of great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world.... The style most perfect in its regularity, the style in the highest abstraction, most strict in its exclusion of life, is peculiar to the peoples at their most primitive cultural level.... it is because he stands so lost and spiritually helpless amidst the things of the external world, because he experiences only obscurity and caprice in the inner-connection and flux of phenomena of the external world, that the urge is so strong in him to divest the things of the external world of their caprice and obscurity in the world- picture and to import to them a value of necessity and a value of regularity.... man is now just as lost and helpless *vis-a-vis* the world-picture as primitive man."[4] Rejecting capricious natural form man adopted decorative form which provides the stability of repetitive symbolism.

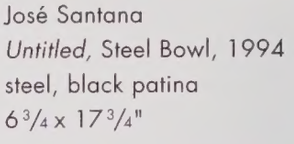
The repeatable symbol prescribes the visualization of cultural identity. Man, in seeking safety within the group, adopts the symbols of that group. Often these symbols are worn in the form of jewelry. The extra large gold chain in Afro-American inner city culture, the crucifixion necklaces in the Chicano cultures, the Rolex watches of the executive elite signify an identification with a like-minded collective. Although decorative, they are not *simply decorative.* As Meredith Rode, in a recent presentation stated, "It is not that form is significant, it is that something significant has been given form". Decoration has meaning. Perhaps the fear of the *simply decorative* indicates a far deeper fear of the loss of meaning in our world. By and large, fine artwork has lost the ability to represent the group. Ornamentation, on the other hand, still has the power to signify something greater than itself. In representing cohesion, security, significant events, or milestones, fine metalwork provides a model which the fine arts should hope to emulate. In doing so, fine art may, like the crafts, find a home in the world.

NOTES

1. "The Marriage of Art and Money," *Art in America,* July 1988.
2. "The Decorated Body," *Parabola,* Fall 1994, pp.. 74-76).
3. "The Decorated Body," p. 76).
4. "Abstraction and Empathy," in C. Harrison and P. Wood, eds., *Art in Theory: 1900-1990,* pp. 70-71).

Elizabeth Jones is an Associate Professor of Art History and Art Theory at the University of Texas at El Paso.





José Santana
Untitled, Steel Bowl, 1994
steel, black patina
6 3/4 x 17 3/4"

ALCHEMY: Metals Made Precious Lynda Watson-Abbott s 25 Years of Influence

The Pope Gallery
Santa Cruz, CA
March 5 - 31, 1995

by Susan Kingsley

The stated purpose purpose of "ALCHEMY: Metals Made Precious Lynda Watson-Abbott's 25 Years of Influence" was to honor Lynda Watson-Abbott and recognize the successful jewelry and metalsmithing program she created at Cabrillo College and to mark her retirement after twenty-five years. An alcove of the gallery was devoted to her most recent work, a series based on barbed wire variations. A statement by students paid tribute to her enthusiasm, dedication, and belief in each individual's creative process.

Additionally, the exhibition affirmed the value of community-based education. Watson-Abbott's long tenure at Cabrillo has resulted in a community positively riddled with artist/jewelers. Unlike art school and university programs which are intended for a population of young students in degree programs who graduate and leave, community colleges serve a wide variety of different needs, values and goals and students are generally there to stay. Included in this exhibition were works by artists in their early twenties and artists in their sixties, some who had gone on and earned bachelors and/or masters degrees and some who took up metalsmithing after retiring from other careers, some who make jewelry in their spare time and some who earn their living doing ACC shows.

Group exhibitions frequently fail to satisfy. One is often left remembering only a few outstanding pieces along with a hastily formed opinion about whether the show lived up to to its stated curatorial purpose, which is frequently uninteresting to begin with. This exhibition was an exception for a number of reasons.

The 2500-square-foot space of the light-filled Pope Gallery was devoted exclusively to this exhibition, which completely filled it. The work was displayed in specially-made, shallow, shadow-box cases backed with primer-gray sprayed foam. The gallery walls were painted sage green for the exhibition. Despite the wide range of work and styles, the installation, which also included conscientious attention to the grouping of works and to lighting, provided visual continuity. Larger work was displayed in the storefront windows and on island pedestals, providing an easy transition to the small scale work in the cases.

Like most group exhibitions of contemporary jewelry and metalsmithing, a wide range of materials and processes was in evidence. Steel, bronze, copper, and plastic were used in addition to the expected precious metals and gemstones. Processes included anticlastic raising, casting, die forming, electroforming, enameling, etching, photo-etching, raising, and reticulation; as well as fabrication, in which there seemed be be a universal proficiency. Although the majority of work chosen was in the category of wearable jewelry, hollowware, sculpture and furniture was also in evidence. Objects were well-crafted, though certainly not of a single aesthetic.

The exhibition was curated by artist and metalsmith Doug McDonald, also a former student of Watson-Abbott. He was assisted by Jamie Abbott, Carol Ball, Shelby Graham, Jane Gregorius, Susan Hoisington, Prudence Masseth, Angela Marise and Lydia Tea Walking. Watson-Abbott provided the starting point, a list of around 200 students with whom she had stayed in contact. McDonald began with the standard procedure of requesting slides from the artists. He soon realized, however, that this approach was not suitable. Much of the work he expected to see had either not been photographed, or the slides did not reflect the quality he knew existed in the work. McDonald worked assiduously tracking down, piece by piece, this high quality exhibition. Although most of the work was for sale, some of the artists do not regularly make art for exhibition or the marketplace. Their work is *seen* only when being worn in the community. If there was anything that distinguished the jewelry in this exhibition, anything that tied it to Santa Cruz, it was a bit of humor, a whiff of irreverence and the personal nature of the majority of the work. The artists, each in their own way and without conceit, pursue art-making as an important part of life. In addition to teaching techniques of metals, which she apparently did very well, Watson-Abbott nourished in her students a desire to continue making art.

Group exhibitions frequently fail to satisfy because they lack a harmonious mutual understanding, a sense of shared purpose. The conclusion of Watson-Abbott's twenty-five-year teaching career provided an opportunity for celebration and an opportunity for this community to observe and re-affirm the value of what they have had. Too often excellence and success in the fields of jewelry and metalsmithing are defined only by how well work can be photographed, how often it is published and how profitably it can be marketed. This exhibition was not only about a community college program, but about the idea of art being a part of lives and a community.

Susan Kingsley is an artist/metalsmith in Carmel, California.

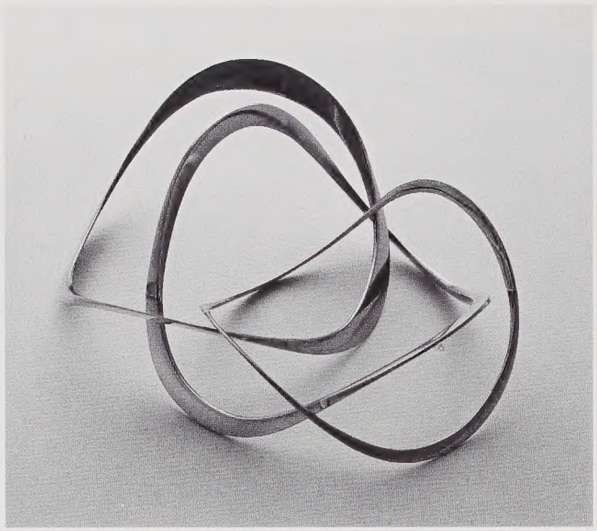
Artists included in the exhibition:

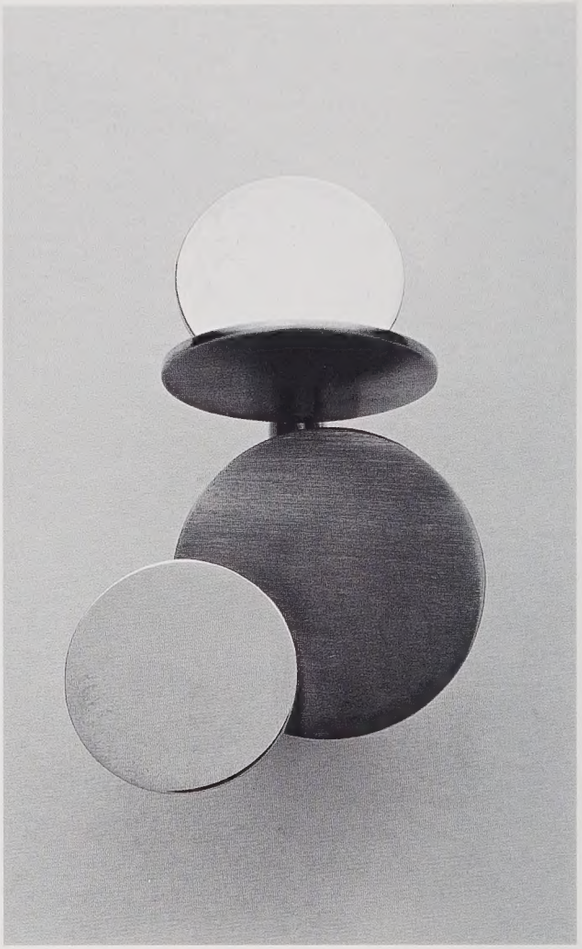
Lynda Watson-Abbott
Holly Bachman
Carolyn L. Ball
Karen Barker
Judy Bettencourt
Judy Dykstra-Brown
Rebecca Bushner
Lotte Cherin
Ta Ta Chook
Michael Dunn
Judy Foreman
Elizabeth Golden
Shelby Graham
Blanche Greenberg
Geraldine Gyger
Betty Heald
Jill Henry
Gerhard Herbst
Elaine Heyman
David Holder
Charles H. Kirk
Elena Laborde
Jessica Phoebe Lee
Scott Lindberg
Angela Marise
Prudence Masseth
Sherry McDermott
Doug McDonald
Joan Mitchell
Lori Mitchell
Sean M. Monaghan
Junko Nakazawa
Andrea O'Donnell
Kris Patzlaff
James C. Payne
Merrylee Rae
Jose Santana
Liza Scully
Norman Sheilds
Patrick Stafford
Marion Stegner
Dan Telleen
Christie Thomas
Lydia Tea Walking
Carol Webb
Larry and Katherine White
Linda Wulfsberg

LEFT
Three Bracelets, c. 1950
14k, sterling

FAR LEFT
Ring, 1970
14k

All photographs are courtesy of the Maryland Institute of Art
All photographs by Erik Kvalsvik





Design • Jewelry • Betty Cooke

Meyerhoff Gallery
Maryland Institute College of Art
Baltimore, MD
June 2 - 25, 1995

by Bruce Metcalf

Betty Cooke graduated from the Maryland Institute in 1946, intending to be a sculptor. She has remained in the Baltimore area ever since, not as a sculptor, but as a jeweler with a large and loyal following. The Maryland Institute mounted a career retrospective of her work in June, 1995 (unfortunately, still a rare occurrence for a jeweler of any caliber but still an interesting opportunity to contemplate a life's work given over to jewelry).

In 1946, cutting-edge craftspeople talked about *good design*. This idea contained echoes of the Arts & Crafts reform movements, in that converts believed they could improve the quality of life by bringing higher standards of design to the general public. In jewelry, the look of the handcrafted object was suppressed in favor of slick, polished surfaces; ornament was restricted in favor of smooth, rounded forms; and the doctrine of truth to materials held sway. It's clear that Betty Cooke was a true believer, and she never strayed far from the ideology and style of a late 1940s designer.

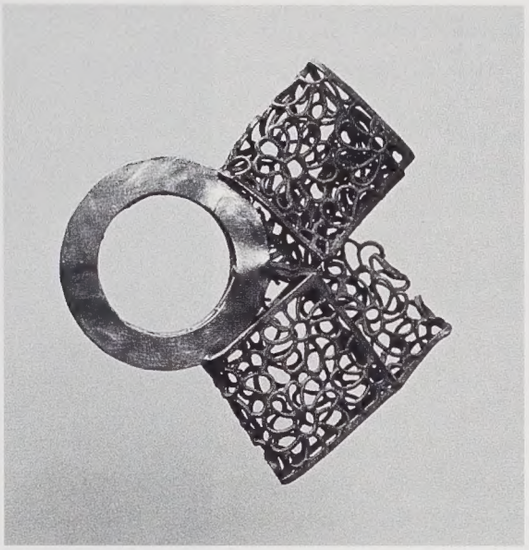
And yet, her work resists being dated. So much '40s and '50s jewelry now looks technically primitive and conceptually shallow: most of us have seen far too many flat kidney-shaped brooches and chains of forged round links. There were a few clichés in Cooke's exhibition: some starburst brooches and rings with single tall cabachons among them. But most of her jewelry has a wonderful sense of subtle irregularity and understated elegance that can never be reduced to cliché. She also knows how to use the visual surprise: an asymmetrical stone or a sudden shift of thin to thick line that keeps most of her work remarkably fresh. Cooke shows how, in the hands of a skilled designer, the doctrine of *good design* remains useful.

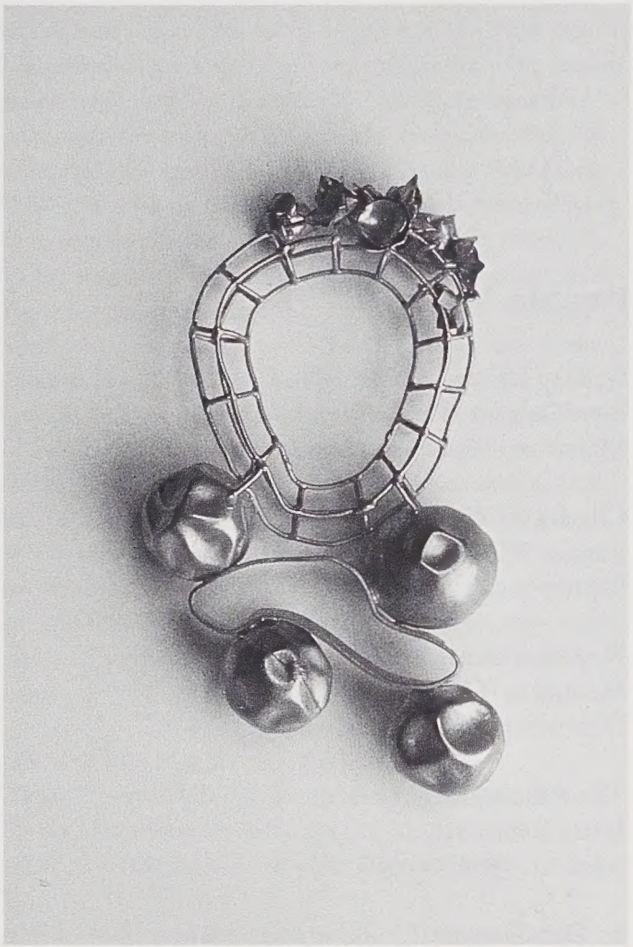
The audience at the exhibition opening demonstrated how responsive people have been to Betty Cooke's approach. Every third woman was wearing at least one Cooke necklace, ring, bracelet, or set of earrings. Evidently, good design has found an appreciative public in Baltimore. Furthermore, every woman I asked knew exactly when and for what reason she had acquired each piece of jewelry. It was obvious that Cooke's jewelry is much loved, because people have added their own layers of sentimental meaning.

This process of investing jewelry with private importance is poorly understood and is often dismissed as trivial, but it is crucial to our understanding of craft in the late 20th century. People don't buy craft out of need, they buy it out of love. So, how and why do people project their passions into an object? It's a difficult question, but Betty Cooke appears to know the answer. Cooke's jewelry is familiar and undemanding, but inventive at the same time. For instance, she appeared to expand her scale in the early 1970s, perhaps influenced by the oversized necklaces produced by Al Paley, Stanley Lechtzin, and others. But instead of commandeering the entire upper torso like Paley and Lechtzin did, Cooke made slender chains of linked tubing that hung both in front and in back. These chains occupied no volume, demanded no concessions from the wearer, and looked smashing on a formal dress. So, her clients could partake of the thrill of wearing radical jewelry, but still not overstep the boundaries of taste or function. It was obviously a successful strategy: I saw at least twenty of these chains being worn at the opening.

Betty Cooke never received the same national recognition as other jewelers of her generation, like Sam Kramer or Ed Weiner. This lack of recognition is unfortunate, because her work has much to say about the *raison d'etre* for contemporary handmade jewelry. And, as the enthusiastic response of her clientele shows, she can probably teach all the art jewelers a thing or two, as well.

Bruce Metcalf is a jeweler from Philadelphia.





Detlef Thomas

Jewelerswerk Galerie
Washington, DC
April 27 - May 18, 1995

by Alyssa Dee Krauss

Detlef Thomas's new work makes fun (out) of serious jewelry. In this series, Thomas imposes chaos upon order, bringing poetry to geometry and a playfulness to technical mastery. He alludes to man and nature, technology and nonsense. Formally, the work perpetuates this mood, humoring the eye and transforming gestural, linear graphics into three-dimensional objects.

Thomas's older work was mainly concerned with overdoing ornamentation, though he also constructed a bunny rabbit ring (whiskers and all) out of 18k. In his new series, Thomas abstracts and punctuates this irreverence and whimsy by constructing highly exact geometric structures and then mashing, twisting, and distorting them. The precious materials, the refined techniques, and the intricate, geometric, architectural constructions are all quite serious; yet, the treatment of these elements is entirely frivolous. Thomas pays fastidious attention to detail and then negates that precision by smashing the work, or leaving a solder spill. It seems as if he treats the same piece with utmost respect and flagrant disregard (although when the work is completed, it has the kind of visual integrity that makes it hard to imagine any bend, distortion or sloppiness as truly unintentional).

Is it a mockery of the pristine Late Modernist Formalism rampant in much of contemporary German work? Is it a reaction to the rigid training of the *Goldschmiedelehre*? Is Detlef Thomas making fun of serious jewelers, the commercial jewelry industry, his own past work, or the aesthetic itself? Or, is he just having fun? (One of his pieces is a very commercial, mass produced granulated silver ring that Detlef found in the street, took home, and smashed with a hammer.)

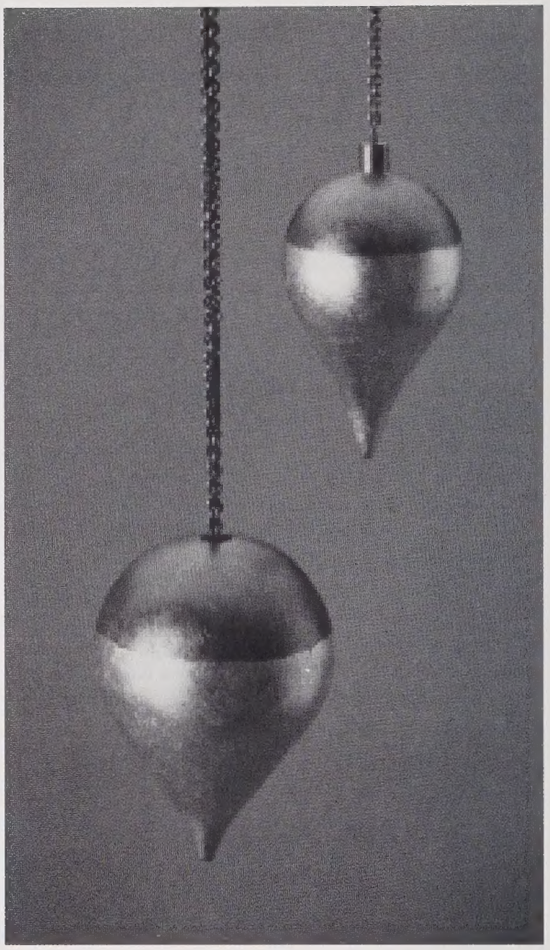
Thomas's playfulness is not limited to the conceptual realm. He instigates a dynamic between volume and mass in his large, extravagant pieces that are, paradoxically, weightless and delicate. He teeters a tall, Gaudiesque skyscraper form on a thin wire shank with a fraction of the visual *weight* of that which it supports; like balancing the Empire State Building on a Hoola-hoop.

By far the most interesting formal attribute in his work is the linear expression and gesture normally associated with drawing. He remarkably captures this quality in his distorted wire forms. At first glance, the fragile skeletal structures really appear to be spontaneous sketches reproduced in metal. On a closer look, however, the former rigidity of these lines and the method behind their madness, is revealed.

When these strictly arranged wire forms become warped and bent, Thomas transforms the geometric into the biomorphic, and brings each piece to life. He improves upon what was man-made and ordered, with what is natural and disordered. He produces vibrant, gestural lines from stoic, Euclidean ones. He creates a visual tug-of-war between chaos and order. It is the residue of this rational thinking still visible through the now entangled jumble that gives Thomas's work its poetry, its sense of history, and its many layers of meaning.

Detlef Thomas's new jewelry is sculptural, though still appropriate to its medium because of its irreverent use of precious materials and traditional jewelry making techniques. In this series, the medium, materials, forms, and processes all converge to strengthen and support his concept. He manipulates his materials into metaphors and he achieves a refined aesthetic throughout. This exhibit sets a poetic example of what jewelry can be.

Alyssa Dee Krauss is a metalsmith, who resides in Mount Vernon, NJ.



Didi Suydam and Joan Parcher
Untitled, 1995
23k leaf
1 7/8 x 1 1/4" (large form)
1 3/4 x 1 5/16 x 1 5/16" (small form)
chain 33" long

Double Vision

Gallery I/O
New Orleans, LA
March 20 - April 10, 1995

Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts
Racine, WI
September 17 - November 5, 1995

National Ornamental Metal Museum
Memphis, TN
December 17, 1995 - February 11, 1996

The Arkansas Art Center
Little Rock, AR
April 21 - June 2,1996

by Deb Stoner

Imagine this experience. It is the opening night of the New Orleans SNAG Festival's gallery tour/endurance contest to seven galleries hosting special exhibits of interest to metalsmiths and jewelers. Seeing any exhibition under these circumstances is bound to not serve the work well. One views the work in a horde of other somewhat interested folks packed into a hot, bustling gallery where seeing the work is one goal, seeing one's friends is the other. But, often, it is the way an exhibition is seen by the majority of its audience.

You walk into Gallery I/O, a small, very crowded, and vivid commercial gallery space. On the wall to your right is a framed curator's statement. You read first about the exhibition "Double Vision" curated by Robert Ebendorf and Thomas Mann, and then about "Crossing Boundaries: Contemporary Jewelry-America, Europe, Australia" organized by Helen Drutt. Oddly there are two completely different exhibitions in this single space. You vie for position in front of the cases filled with jewelry. There are artists' names printed in small black letters taped to the Plexiglas cases: you look at the names and the order in which they are presented and attempt to match them up with the work. If you know the work, you can usually connect the dots. When confronted with unfamiliar work, the labels confuse. You realize at some point that the work in cases that divide the length of the gallery are the familiar objects shown in Helen Drutt's lecture that morning, and indeed, a large, but obscurely placed sign overhead indicates that this is so. "Double Vision" is spelled out in large letters on one wall to indicate that the wall cases contain work of that show. And the pieces along the other wall? Those must be the non-collaborative part of the "Double Vision" show. You've gone through half of the gallery before you even know how this works.

The jewelry is placed on props prominently stamped "MAN-MADE", props that call for the viewer to make assumptions about or reflections on the jewelry or objects that the props hold. A bracelet by Heinz Brummel and Cheryl Rydmark is held by an elaborate bronze device that is larger than the bracelet itself. I stood nearby listening to people's comments as they contemplated this object. I plucked the bracelet off its prop, breaking implicit gallery rules ("Don't touch!") and several people gathered: "Oh! I didn't know that was a bracelet!" Whose responsibility is this? The viewer, for not getting the message? Neckpieces were displayed on large bronze plaques with curved holders that hold the piece out from the wall. These are effective mounts for showing the three-dimensional quality of the necklaces, but they force the viewer into making the distinction between the beginning and end of the piece, and the beginning and end of the prop. After seeing two or three such pieces, one understands how they are meant to work, and the props become merely the props that they are meant to be. The only person's work that is well served by this display system is Thomas Mann's. Designed for his work, the mounts display it, nay, enhance it, well.

I returned to an almost empty gallery the next day and spent three hours with the exhibition, looking at each piece with effort, slowly and with contemplation, trying to understand each piece as well as the show as a whole. I introduced myself to the woman in charge of the gallery who assured me that she could answer any questions I might have. I told her I was writing a review so she would not be confused by my intentions. My first questions were logistic: we walked to the first case and I asked: "Which of these five pieces are done by Teri Blonde and which are Bobbie Sue's?" She laughed, and in a loud stage

whisper said: "Well I probably shouldn't tell you this, but they are the same person. There is no Bobbie Sue." Now, I should make it clear that I love a good prank. A collaborative show with forty North American metals artists; but really it's 39. Ha ha? The accompanying catalog essay makes no mention of this, indeed it treats the work of this collaborative team of Teri Blonde/Bobbie Sue with all seriousness and importance. The number of artists in the exhibition is repeatedly stated as fact throughout literature about the show, and one has no reason to believe that this fact may be fiction. Perhaps if Teri Blonde/Bobbie Sue's work were more interesting and less derivative of North American narrative art jewelry done better by artists represented in the same display case, I would be less offended by this prank. I fantasized, hoping to make the whole thing worthwhile: split personality? sex change/transition personality, hey we're in New Orleans? Work so cutting-edge that no one in the world is worthy of collaboration with this avant garde artist? But none of these scenarios seemed true, and I am still irked by the sham, less trusting of the curator's intentions.

I looked at each piece in the exhibition as the cases were opened, and I handled some of the jewelry. I love this part: I tried things on, I touched objects to understand them. I played with Didi Suydam's and Joan Parcher's elegant neckpiece and understood the act of filling the hollow pendant with its chain to create a lovely sculptural form in addition to its success as beautiful jewelry. I'm lucky; I held Gary Noffke's and Rob Jackson's heavy silver ladle, to find the balance, to appreciate how the piece felt; I found hidden sapphires that one would only discover when using the piece.

I contemplated Jill Slosburg-Ackerman's paintings (did anyone else even see these two pieces, displayed on a wall, one above another, just before the entrance to the gallery?) and Joe Wood's three wire objects displayed in wooden presentation cases labeled "Harmony", "Logic", "Deceit", and I understood their Exquisite Corpse piece because of each artist's strong aesthetic and conceptual input. I read the phone conversation/artist's statement that was meant to be displayed with Lane Coulter and Jim Cotter's collaborative cement bowl and carved wooden spoon set, and I laughed out loud, clear about the honesty of their collaborative friendship and work habits. I am intrigued with Valerie Mitchell and Sandra Enterline's series of rings, each ring physically the work of one artist, but collaborative as a series, thoughtful and well developed. Enterline's two ring set with hollowed out magnets to set a diamond is conceptually astute and complex, spare and elegant.

I applaud the work of these and other successful collaborations and hope that the artists will continue such explorations. In the essay in the exhibition's catalog, Bruce Pepich writes that "Collaboration requires risk taking".[1] The risk is, essentially, that the whole might be less than the sum of the parts. Several collaborations reveal this problem. One might suggest judicious editing by some of the artists themselves.

This article however, is intended to be less a review of the work in the exhibition than it is about the exhibition as a whole. It is unfortunate that the first venue of this traveling exhibition (and for "Crossing Boundaries" as well) is a cramped and inappropriate commercial gallery space. Both exhibitions deserve an expansive, well lit space; indeed, each piece in each show deserves such. Instead we were offered a confusing spatial arrangement that included jewelry from Mann's regular Gallery I/O collection. I wonder how different my impressions would be had the show taken place in that spare space that I yearned for. What I hope to point out is the importance of the entire scenario.

The exhibition was accompanied by a catalog of the show, produced by the Wustum Museum with corporate sponsorship. The catalog documents the exhibition well, with a black and white photograph of each piece, a resume of the artists involved, artists' statements that talk about their work, the collaborative process, or the singular artist's own work. There is a dense essay by Wustum Museum Director Bruce Pepich that does little to really enlighten. He writes about each piece with descriptions of the artist's intentions that seem somewhat inflated. As I looked at some of the objects and read the artist's statements and read Mr. Pepich's comments, I wondered how did he infer all of that. I asked Mr. Pepich about this and he told me that he had seen only the collaborative pieces, and not the accompanying pieces made by each artist. And so, unfortunately, the essay concerns only half of the exhibition. The admirable intent of the curators in this show is to compare and contrast the results of the collaborative process. And if one has nothing to compare the results to, one is just commenting on a singular piece that, in some cases, has little to do with collaboration.

One last point: there was a statement that appears on what would usually be considered a price list that was readily available throughout the gallery. It said:

> "THE FOLLOWING PIECES ARE NOT FOR SALE.
> THE ARTISTS HAVE GENEROUSLY DONATED THEIR
> PIECES TO THE PERMANENT COLLECTION OF
> THE WUSTUM MUSEUM IN RACINE, WISCONSIN."

Because I know many of the artists involved, I am aware that not everyone was happy with this arrangement. The problem is that the concept of donating the entire show to the Wustum Museum was presented to the artists after they had created their work. This is purely conjecture, but let me ask: if the artists involved had known that their work would be donated before making their pieces, would their work have been the same? Would we be seeing a show with a heavy emphasis on found objects, alternative (cheap) materials, time saving techniques? Or, on the other hand, perhaps the artists would take their charge with more seriousness, knowing that the work will be part of a permanent collection, honored by their work's inclusion in such an important show. Perhaps they would be less experimental, take fewer risks, unwilling to show unresolved work. The point is that it would probably make a difference.

I'm glad there are artists who donate work to help to build museum collections, to help educate the public about what we as metalsmiths do, to further our field, and to keep the collective consciousness of metalsmithing alive and thriving. I'm glad there are people like Ebendorf and Mann who have a conversation of what ifs that ends up as a show that makes people think, that will reside in museums that are willing to show engaging work. In spite of some problematic aspects of "Double Vision", it is a stimulating exhibition with a challenging topic that will continue to intrigue adventurous artists.

Deb Stoner is a metalsmith who resides in Portland, Oregon.

Catalog available from the Wustum Museum

[1] *Double Vision*, exhibition monograph, statement by curators Robert Ebendorf and Thomas Mann, published by the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, 1995.

RIGHT
Leaking Box #2, 1970
silver

FAR RIGHT
Onion Teapot, 1952
sterling, ebony, wrapped handle
Collection of the MFA, Boston

John Prip: Medal for Excellence in Craft Award and Exhibition

Society of Arts and Crafts
Boston, MA
May 6 - June 25, 1995

by Jane Port

It would be easy for anyone to wander through this exhibit spellbound by the gleam of metal, the variety of sensuous forms and surfaces, and the quick wit of metalsmith John Prip's playful and reverent relationship to his materials. Contrasts abound in this retrospective exhibit that covers over 45 years and numbers near 150 objects. We marvel at the absolute technical assurance of the raised hollowware yet we are charmed by the tenderness of simple white butcher's string binding a stone found on the beach. Versatility and a searching spirit characterize the story of Prip's career.

Born in New York in 1922 to an American mother and Danish father, John Prip is a fourth generation metalsmith. Returning with his family to Denmark at age eleven, he entered a traditional five-year apprenticeship program in silversmithing at fifteen. Afterward he worked for several years for various Scandinavian firms as a designer craftsman. These traditional skills earned Prip his first academic position and in 1948 he returned to the United States to help re-establish traditional silversmithing skills at the School for American Craftsmen. During the same period, Prip co-founded Shop One to provide a retail outlet for the studio artist. Working in the industrial field during the 1950s, he updated the design aesthetic of the flatware and hollowware produced by the Reed and Barton Company of Taunton, Massachusetts. Beginning in the 1960s at the Rhode Island School of Design he managed to break new ground and develop programs in the emerging studio art field. Artist, teacher, entrepreneur, industrial designer, John Prip's accomplishments include an innovative and influential body of work.

The two-room gallery upstairs at the Society's Newbury Street location offers just enough space for the objects to be arranged attractively without seeming crowded. Vitrines are situated at comfortable viewing levels with labels in clear view. The pieces range in time from 1950 to winter, 1995. Placed about the rooms according to form and function more than chronology are silver hollowware and flatware forms, jewelry, boxes, sculpture of various metals, a sketch book, drawings, and paper maquettes. Stone, bone, semi-precious stones, shells, gourds, and paper, alone and in combination, are placed on equal terms with metal. Prip's repertoire of processes is long and open-ended.

The bay windows and fireplace in the gallery, reminders of the rooms' former life as a domestic interior, work well with these objects. Prip's altered stones and postcards line the fireplace mantle as if they were at home. A round black electric plug and wire are carefully and precisely connected to a loaf-sized rough-textured oval stone with a machined fitting. Perhaps referring to utterly ineffective couplings or technology's problematic relationship to nature, the subject includes the pristine beauty of the oval stone paired with the respectful though insistent alteration by the artist. A black and white postcard of Marilyn Monroe is covered with a white paper grid of punched holes achieving a kind of witty short cut to the multiple views of the image made by Andy Warhol.

The technical precision and appreciation of essential natural form seen in the altered stones is apparent in the silver tea and coffee pots and flatware from the 1950s in the center of this room. Prip's raised *Onion Teapot* (1952) exemplifies the clean lines of mid-century Scandinavian design. (Happily, it has been purchased from the exhibition by a donor for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts). Prip learned the technique of wrapping rattan to shield the heat conducting handles for a number of his teapots. The sleek *Diamond Coffee Service* and *Lark Flatware* (1957) made as prototypes for production by Reed and Barton Company are included in this display case. Prip's ability to hand raise a prototype with an understanding of how it would be put into production on the factory floor was a rare skill in America.

His return to teaching in the 1960s brought an opportunity for new investigation in form, process, and materials. The elegant raised copper spiculums, as wide as two outstretched arms were first made in the 1960s, and returned to in the 1990s. They hover rhythmically one above the other at the entrance to the exhibition creating what seem to be horizon lines above a beach of the small, smooth stones that Prip loves to collect from along the New England seacoast. This first impression of looking out toward the sea involves a calm feeling of balance and equilibrium experienced in Prip's work in general. It also suggests the importance of the sea and its inhabitants in his oeurvre such as in the two animated silver and gold crabs pins captured in one of the jewelry cases. These works are of human, even intimate, scale and beg to be handled and enjoyed. Whether their function is practical or imaginative, Prip's objects engage our attention on an elemental human level that returns us to our common origins and impulses.

A thirty-minute videotaped interview with the artist offers an introduction to the man and his work to visitors of the exhibition. Prip's lucid and disarmingly modest and direct discussion of his life and work offers a broad view of the role of the artist in the third quarter of the twentieth century and of his own particular multi-faceted role. Copies of the tape are available from the Society for $20.00 and postage.

Although he is a disciplined worker who puts in regular hours every day, Prip describes his work habits as actively anti-productive. He believes the only good reason to make something is because it appeals to the maker at that time. Objects may be started, put down and finished later or the same form such as the spiculum, made again years later. His curiosity prompts him to dream of making something never seen before in history.

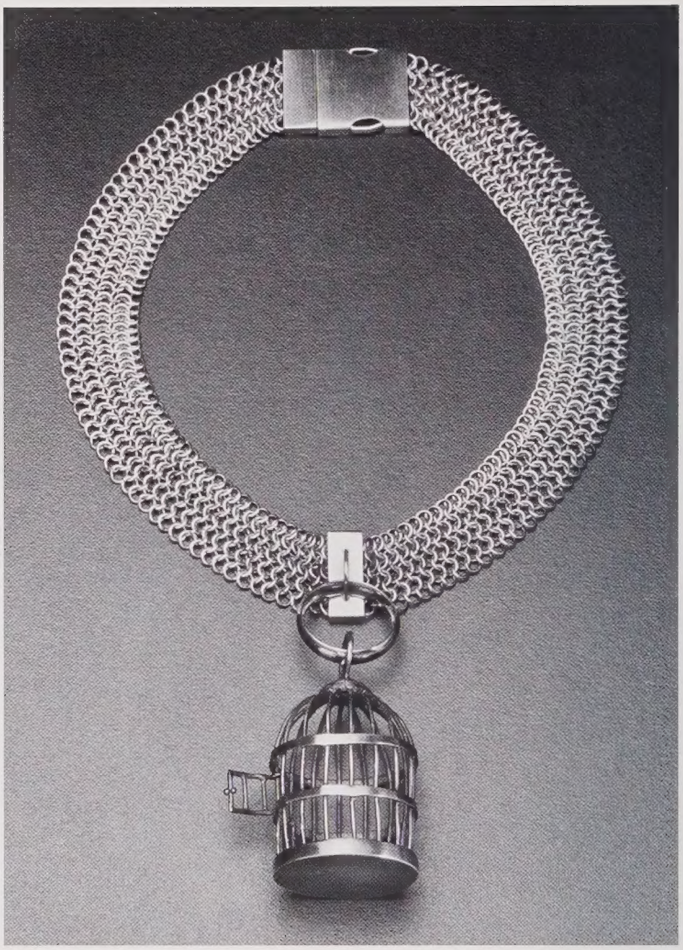
Boxes and containers of all kinds have been born in Prip's studio since the form arose as a less limiting vehicle for expression in the 1960s and loosened the grip of traditional functional vessel forms. The enigmatic silver and gold *Fish Box with Lid* (1965-66) gives us the whole creature as container with a domed silver lid. The humorous *Willy's Bone* (1969) and *Finger Box* (1970) are containers made in the shape of human body parts. *Leaking Box No.2* (1970) plays with the illusion of liquid metal. Later containers like the monumental *Steel Container with Lid* (1989), a slim rectangular sheath or the bronze *Sumo Jar* (1985), rotund in shape, carry an aura of ritual and tradition. Most recently, the artist has collected small, oval stones from the seashore. At first he used sandblasting techniques to radically alter their texture, creating script-like raised patterns on some, face-like designs in others. Later, he sandblasted a cavity, polished the stone and added his own stamped silver lids decorated with abstract patterns and symbols. Collecting and altering a natural product for domestic or ritual use is a timeless human activity. Following that impulse, the exquisite union of nature and culture in these small objects proves extremely satisfying.

The Boston Society of Arts and Crafts was the major force behind the arts and crafts movement in New England in the early twentieth century. Its influence was felt across America and medalists from its prominent metal guild often enjoyed national recognition. None could have been a more deserving recipient than John Prip.

Jane Port is a writer and a decorative arts historian. She lives in Wellesly, MA.

RIGHT
Sara Shepherd
S Loves L: Love Song, (Choker), 1994
sterling, 14k, 8½"

FAR RIGHT
Joana Kao
I Never Liked Musical Chairs, (neckpiece), 1994
sterling silver, 24k kum-bo
Photo: Doug Yaple



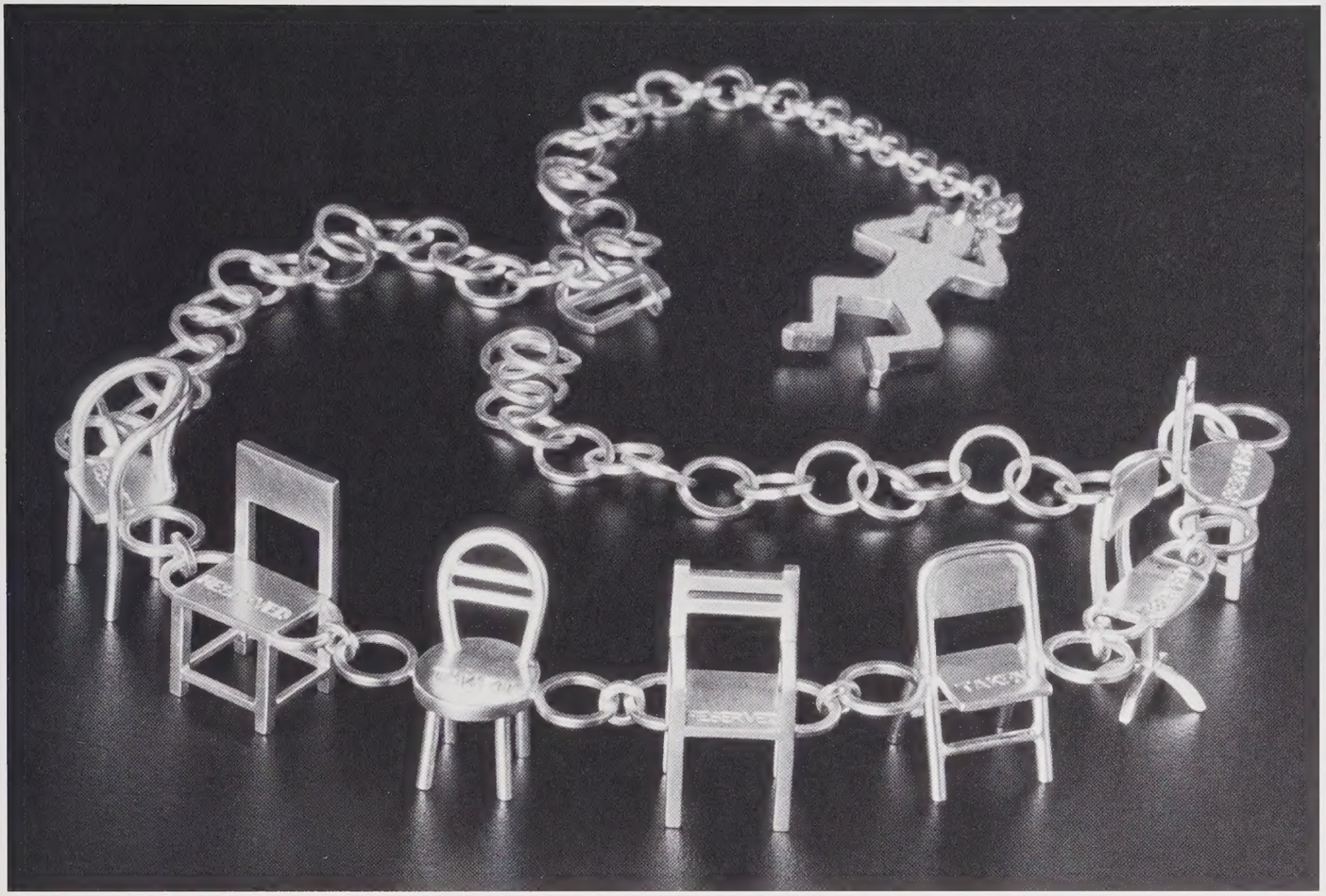
Revealing Elements
Work by Three Metal Artists: Denise Barr, Sara Shepherd, Joana Kao
curated by Victoria Haven

MIA Gallery, Seattle, WA
March 2 - April 2, 1995

by Dana Standish

Poignancy is the order of the day in this show by three young women at the MIA Gallery. Most people have an almost allergic reaction to the word *poignant.* Just the mere sound of it, an elongated whine of a word that you have to draw out through your nose as though it were on the end of a thread, makes people run for cover. *Poignant* conjures up a cloying sentimentality, or that most dreaded of all epithets, a *female* sensibility. But the root of the word is from the French *poindre,* "to pierce," and many of the works in this show are heart-piercing indeed in their comments on love and loss, the power and limitations of faith, and our universal desire, as humans, for belongingness. This is a show rife with female power and female sensibility in its most poignant and energetic sense.

Not all of the profound significance of each piece of Sara Shepherd's work is readily accessible to the viewer. The successful pieces are the ones that can convey this *universal particular,* a recognition on the part of the viewer. But sometimes the exact meaning of the artist's vision may be lost on the viewer and the artist must resort to obscure titles in an effort to clarify the meaning of the image. Yet, this can often compromise success. Such is the fate of Shepherd's *Ego Structure,* a work that smacks of a BFA Thesis Show. Because of the imagery one can guess at the work's ponderous importance, but I like to be hit over the head with messages, myself. Shepherd is more on target with *S Loves L: Love Song,* a piece which shows the subtle power of which she is obviously capable. A chain-mail choker fits snugly around the neck of the female form on which it's displayed. The chain-mail seems just right – a symbol of painstakingly-made bondage and protection. From the choker hangs an empty, silver birdcage with an open door; whatever love was there has surely flown. The cage hangs from a gold wedding band, inscribed "S Loves L". This piece beautifully combines message with imagery. Its emptiness is palpable, due to the fullness of the artist's vision.

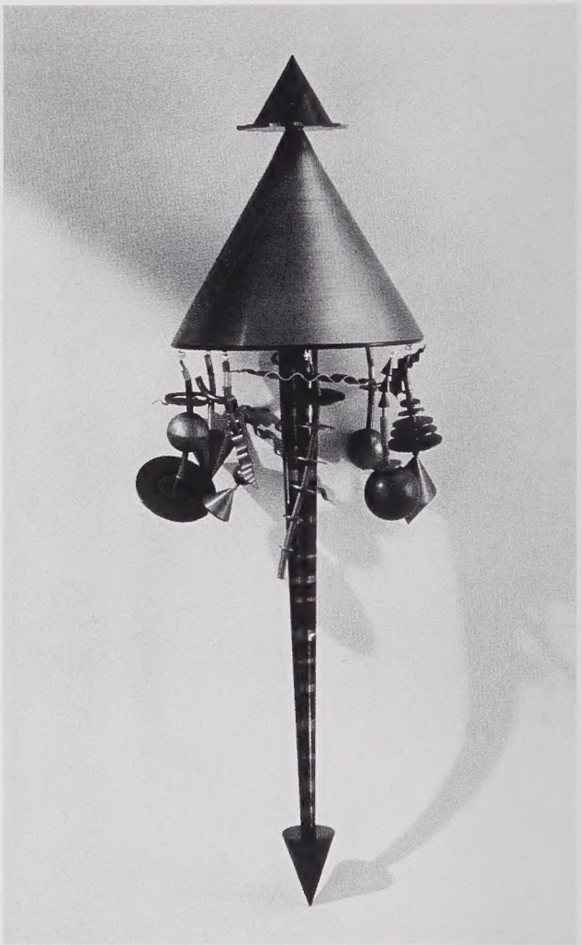


Denise Barr uses Catholic iconography to make her statements. She combines mass-produced enamelled images of the Virgin Mary and the Baby Jesus with found and/or constructed objects on which she often stamps messages from popular culture or of her own devising. An example is a pair of earrings with a central icon of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child, attended by angels. From the bottom hangs a cross and from that a small star. Barr has stamped "When You Wish Upon a Star," on one earring, and "Your Dreams Come True" on the other. In this case she would do better to forget about the jewelry side of things and concentrate on developing her imagery, which she has sacrificed in the name of earrings, not always a good choice. There are several Frida Kahlo inspired pieces that work well as jewelry. A large image of Kahlo's face, bezel set under a lens with all sorts of *milagros* inside: hair, a tiny silver bird, flower petals, is surrounded by the stamped words "A Duras Penas; Through Hard Pain". Below Kahlo's eye is a bezel set taxidermist's eye staring with the same intensity. Below this hangs a cross of black. Other works borrow so heavily from Catholic iconography as to be almost indistinguishable from Church objects. When Barr combines this imagery with her own vision and message her works are most effective.

Joana Kao also uses the narrative structure in her works to varying degrees of success. *Culturally Challenged* is a silver half-sphere with a small propeller on the front. On a stage inside the sphere stands a crowd of people of different colors. When you spin the propeller, the platform spins to the bottom and a new crowd of people appears from the underside of the stage. In each case there is one person who is a different color from the rest. It is a simple yet eloquent visual representation of the person who is *different,* yet essentially the same as those around him/her. In her artist's statement, Kao says that she tries to communicate her feelings of being Chinese-American, and the frustration she feels when people want her to declare that she is "one or the other". In this piece it seems that Kao sacrifices some of the power of the image by hanging the central statement on a somewhat ordinary (though handmade) chain. *I Never Liked Musical Chairs* is a necklace-bracelet combination with a lone person left out, hanging at the end of the necklace's chain. From the front of the necklace hang handmade chairs of different styles; all are stamped "Reserved" or "Taken". Again Kao explores the pain of the outsider, this time in a more personal basis than in *Culturally Challenged.* I have the same concerns about the unexciting nature of the chain in this piece, but here her vision seems to be clearer than in the other work.

The MIA Gallery has given these young women a forum, a place where they can be heard, for surely artwork is the *voice* of the visual artist. Some of the works in this show are the early attempts at speech; some of them whisper their power, while some shout incoherently. Often the work speaks beautifully, and it is up to us to listen.

Dana Standish is a metalsmith living in Seattle, WA.



Christina DePaul
Shrove Shaker, 1994
anodized aluminum, 13 x 4 1/2"

Makers & Shakers

Mario Villa Gallery
New Orleans, LA
April 1 - 31, 1995

Wheeler Gallery
Deer Isle, ME
June 7 - July 25, 1995

Edith Lambert Gallery
Santa Fe, NM
August 3 - September 21, 1995

Margo Jacobsen Gallery
Portland, OR
September 30 - October 30, 1995

by Julie Flanigan

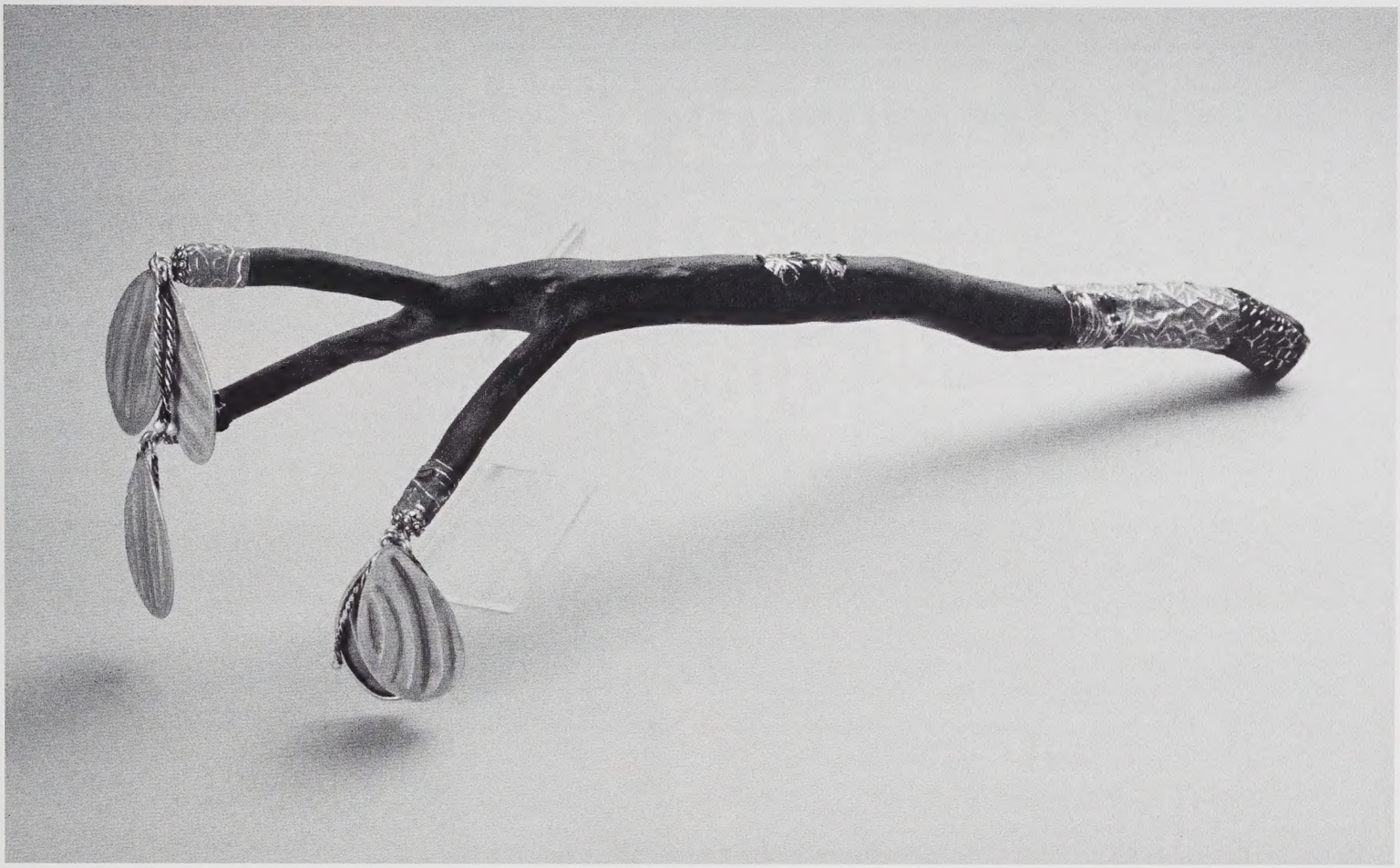
In a city alive with sights and sounds such as New Orleans, the title "Makers & Shakers" brings many images to mind: people swaying to the rhythms at Jazzfest, colorful Mardi Gras beads flying through the air in the French Quarter, dice rattling in the palm of a gambler at the new casino. The exhibition by this name at Mario Villa Gallery, opening in conjunction with SNAG 1995, did not disappoint New Orleans viewers.

Rosanne Raab Associates invited contemporary metalsmiths to exhibit their work in "Makers & Shakers" and instructed them to research the shaker. I found shaker in the Random House dictionary defined as "n. 1. a person or thing that shakes. 2. a container with holes in the top, used for holding and sprinkling sugar, salt, etc." Armed with similar knowledge, the thirty participating metalsmiths produced work for the show which is varied in style, materials, and intent. Ranging from traditional shakers for salt & pepper and cinnamon to a large aluminum rattle in all the colors of Mardi Gras, each design combined the spirit of its maker and his or her interpretation of the shaker.

Unlike most people who saw the show in the back gallery at Mario Villa, I was fortunate also to be able to hear the show. As I explored the gallery before the official opening, the work had arrived and had been unpacked, but it was not yet displayed in glass cases. Two things about this situation were very exciting. First was the opportunity to identify the makers of the unlabeled work. Using the invitation as a cue card combined with my knowledge of these artists, labeling each piece was a challenge. The second surprise was the added pleasure of sound as I picked up several of the shakers to hear their music. The noise, the feel of the piece in the hand, and the ability to see and feel the full three dimensionality of the work made my first trip to the gallery very worthwhile.

On my next visit, I found the work properly displayed in cases, and was provided with an exhibit list which identified each piece by title and designer. Many of the artists took advantage of the high-spirited show title and gave their designs descriptive and intriguing names. Marcia MacDonald's neckpiece *Shaken Not Stirred,* contains a caged silver spoon. Sue Amendolara's *Jungle Song* rainstick rattle is a soft three dimensional column of silver delicately wrapped in a leafy vine. Arlene Fisch created *Fish Are Quiet Shakers,* a metal sphere with a small opening on top that has fish bouncing from springs above it. And with a predictably off-beat sense of humor is Fred Woell's *I Spy Alert Mace Rattle Spy-Scope,* a tall pillar of telescoping layers of brass and copper. On Woell's scope shaker are photoetched portraits: a woman and a group of gentlemen; three hands with outstretched fingers point in three different directions; and a 1966 penny. Commercial keys hanging from the scope's rim, twisted out of working shape and engraved with "It is unlawful to duplicate this key," provide the rattle for this shaker.

Many of the pieces have attachments, parts connected to the work with mechanisms that allow movement. The viewer imagines that the parts will move if the piece is agitated and develops a desire to hear the instrument's music. A piece like *ROY's Greek Rhythm,* wristform tambourine, for example, must be worn and shaken, allowing the domed bottle cap hemispheres to rattle against their temple cage.



Several of the pieces in the show are objects which could fit into the category of noise makers. Tom Loria's *Wrist Whirler*, a heavily textured copper form, looks like a branch covered with woodpecker holes. Berry-like beads rest in the holes where the musician holds the whirler; wavy metal charms dangle from jump rings providing the rattle when the wrist kicks into action.

The spirit of Douglas Harling's shaker, *The Ghost Outside/The Devil Within,* created from a branch, comes from the three frail fingers reaching out from a skeletal arm. Painted in vibrant colors to ward off evil spirits, charms dangle from the appendages, clinking together as the shaker is held.

Boris Bally's *Armform for Tyl Eulenspiegel* is a thick gold plated brass bangle with three pod shaped appendages which orbit around the wearer's wrist. Inside the shiny silver pods, which have pierced geometric patterns, hematite and black onyx balls rattle as the arm moves. In Bally's statement, we learn the inspiration behind his shaker design and the piece seems to come to life. As Bally explains, "Tyl Eulenspiegel was a famed European jester with bells on his cap. The rattle's playful sound comes from its three pods which are filled with semiprecious stone beads. Mysterious things happen when the wearer sings, dances and rattles his armform rhythmically."

Robin Kraft used the the human figure to make a poignant statement in *Ghosts.* The simplified person, fabricated from silver, is a flat structure appearing lifeless with a hollowed out core. From the empty interior a shadowy figure, mimicking the outer form, springs a ball on the end of a stretched coil. For Kraft this shaker references the ghost of cancer, rattling around inside the body like a time bomb waiting for detonation. The eerie quality the artist intended is easily felt by the viewer who longs to know what the figure holds in its negative space.

I found the most elegant piece in "Makers & Shakers" to be Joy Raskin's *Flex/Shake,* a delicately woven rattle with a very soft, private sound. The surface has an intricate texture, playing silver and brass together with the look of a tightly woven metal basket. The form has the shape of a small maraca or a religious implement. The 7½" rattle has a comfortable, mystical feel when cradled in the shaker's hand.

The reasons for delicate metalwork to be displayed under the protective cover of glass are obvious. Nonetheless, the works in "Makers & Shakers" call out to be handled. Viewers cannot understand the cleverness of many of the shakers when exploring them only with their eyes as movement and sound are crucial elements of the artist's intent. It would be educational and more enjoyable for viewers if there were a forum for such work to be displayed openly and interactively.

Julie Flanigan is a metalsmith working in Baltimore and teaching at Maryland Institute, College of Art.

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Douglas Harling
The Ghosts Outside/The Devil Within, 1994
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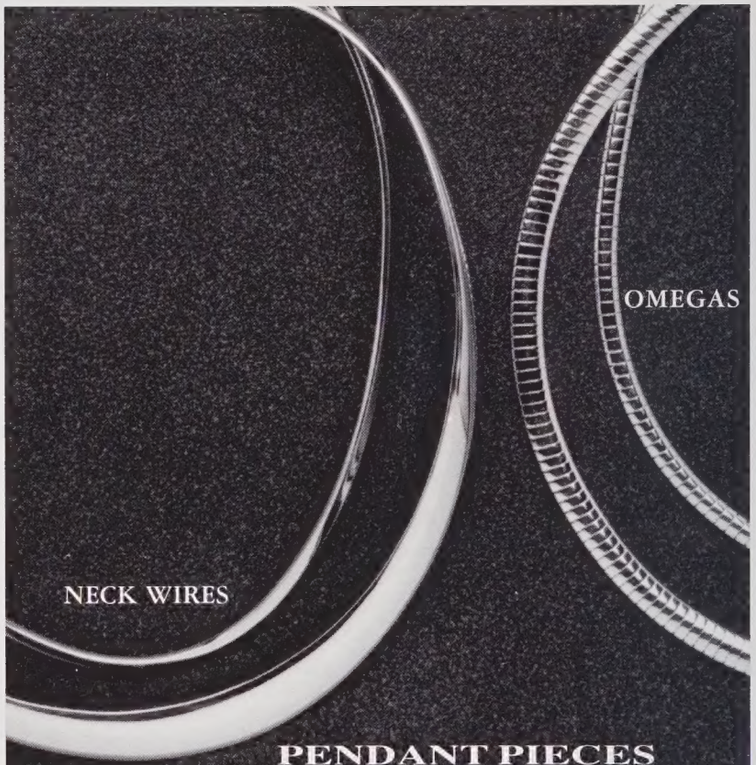

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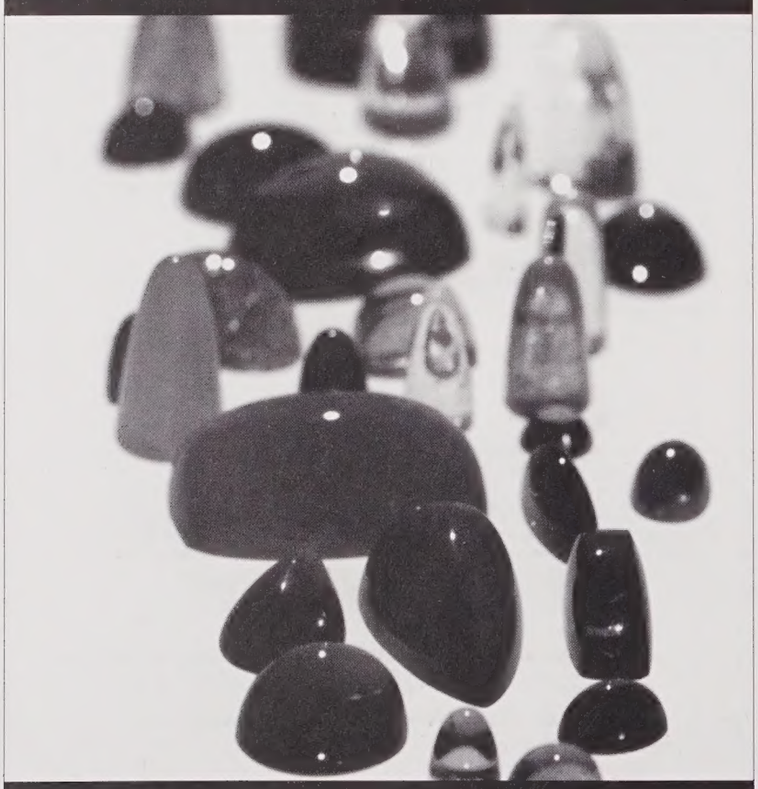

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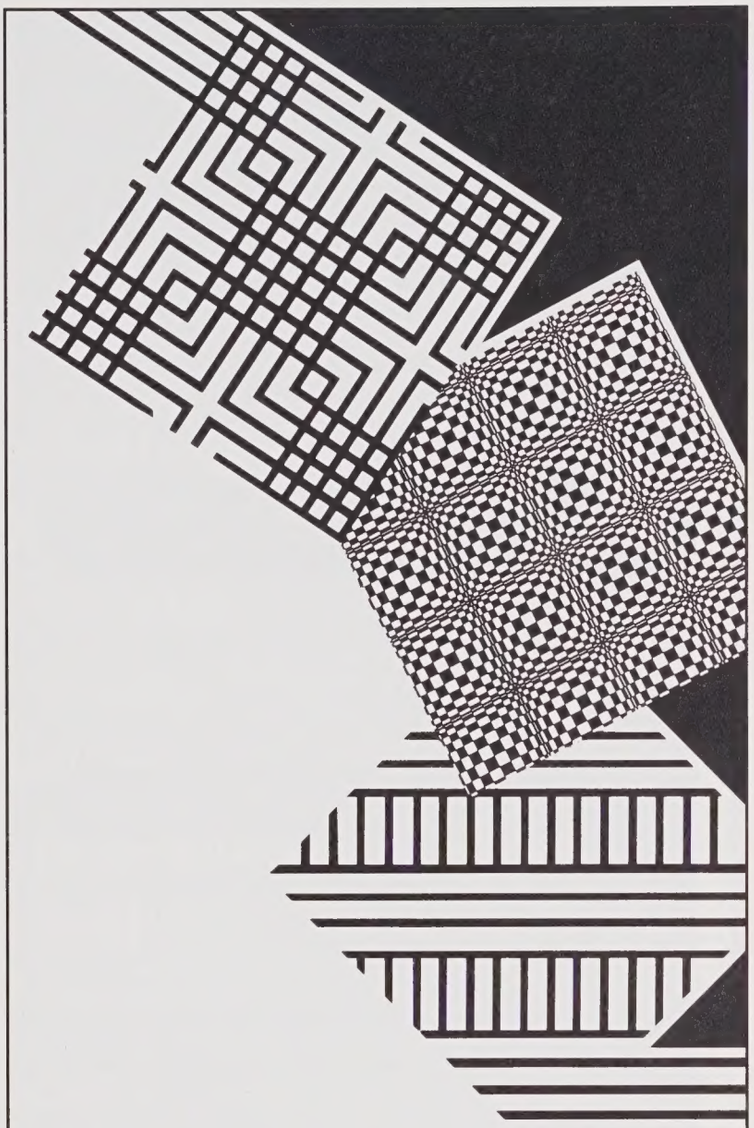

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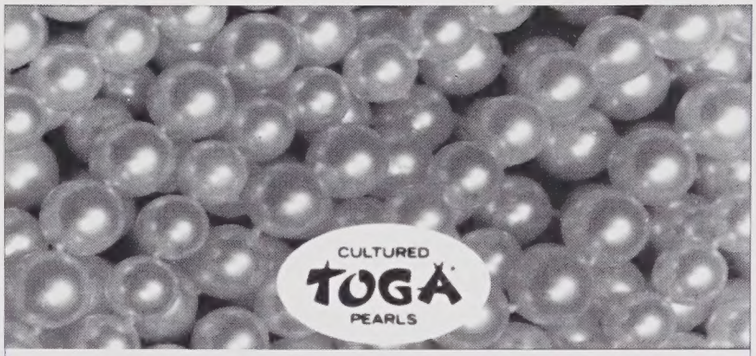

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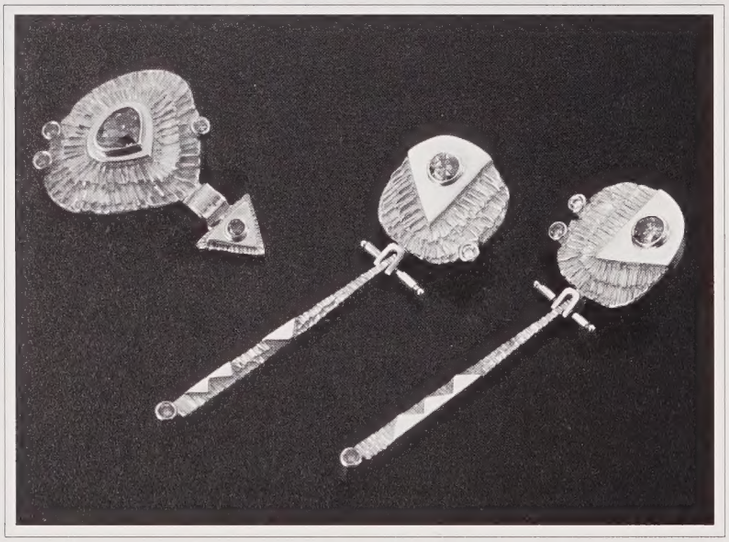

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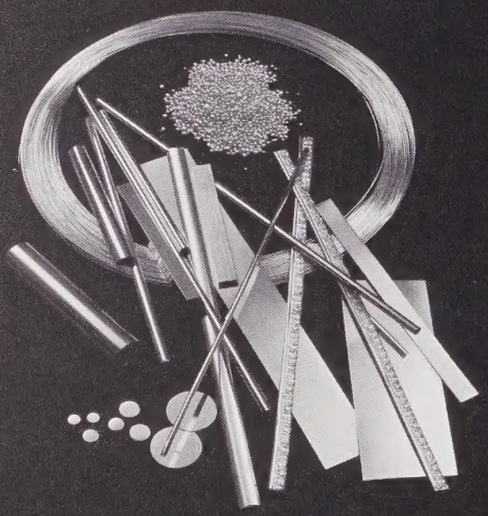

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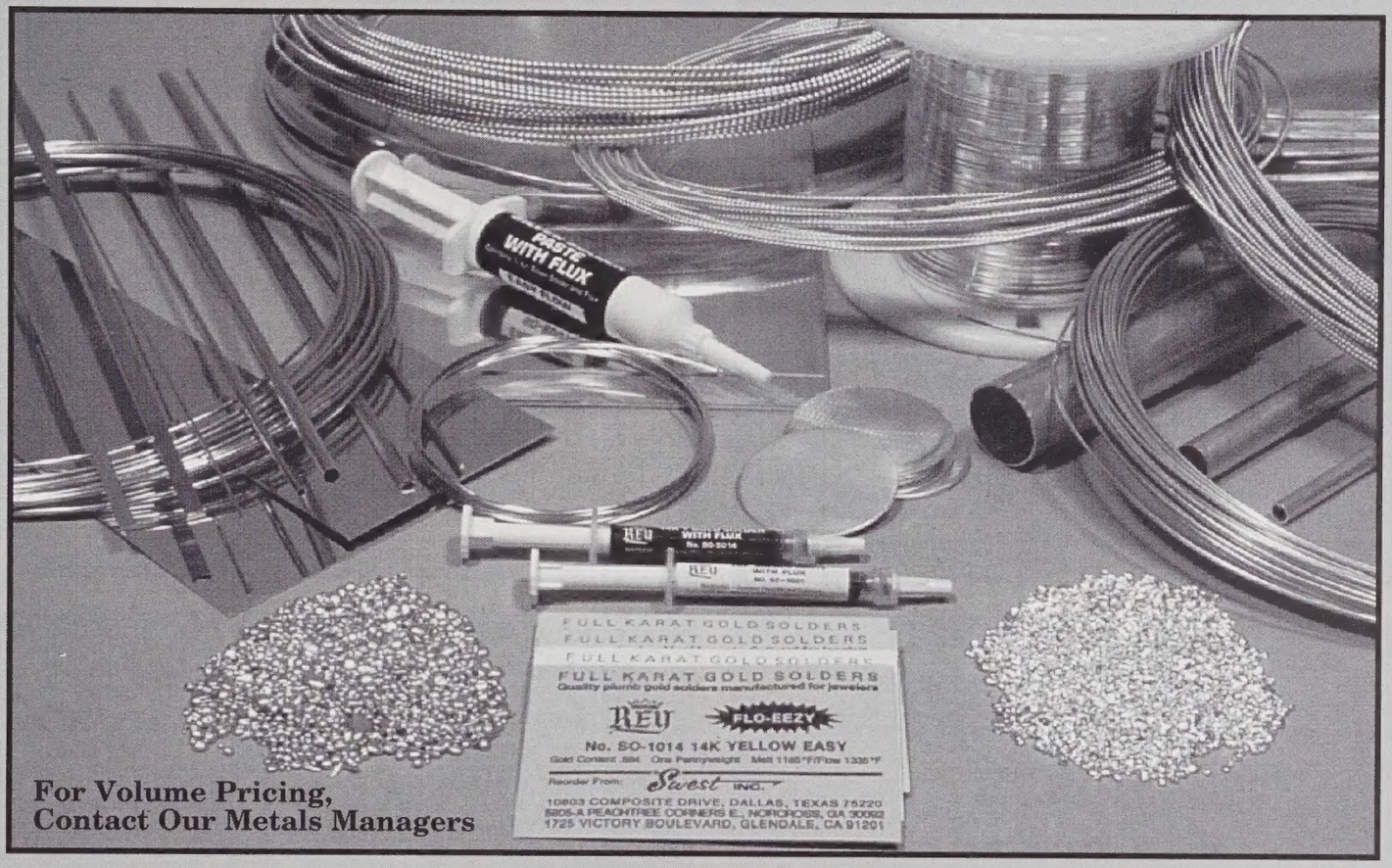
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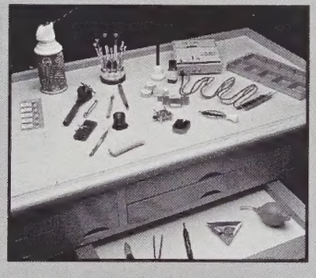

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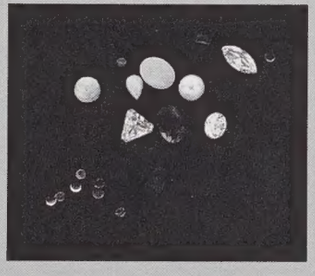

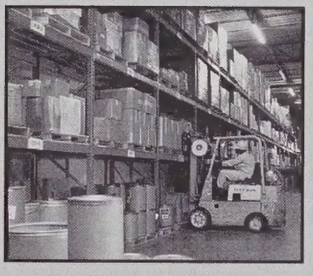

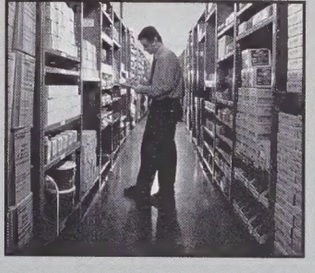

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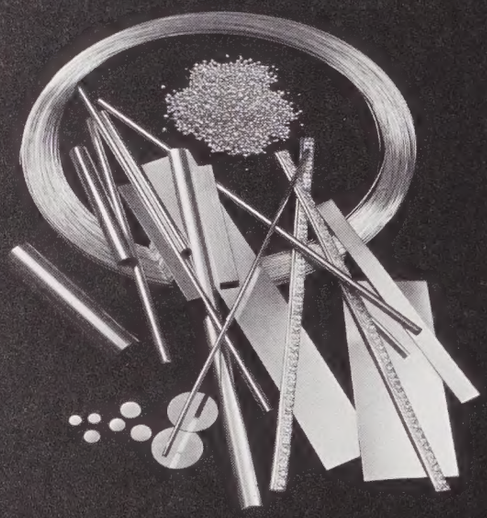

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1996

EXHIBITION IN PRINT

Metalsmith and the Society of North American Goldsmiths are soliciting slides of recent work of metalsmithing and jewelry to be juried for inclusion in the *1996 Metalsmith Exhibition in Print.* Approximately 40 artists will be selected for the publication which will include works reproduced entirely in four-color, artists' statements and biographical information, and a critical essay, all presented with *Metalsmith*'s traditional standards of quality and editorial excellence. The publication will appear as an addition to *Metalsmith*'s quarterly issues and will be mailed to all SNAG members and *Metalsmith* subscribers in September 1996. It will also be made available for newsstand purchase.

All jewelers and metalsmiths who are current residents of Canada, Mexico or the United States and its territories are eligible and encouraged to apply. Students are also eligible. Artists featured in the 1994 or 1995 *Exhibition in Print* are *not* eligible for the 1996 publication. All work must be original and produced within the last two years (1994 or later).

The entry fee, payable to SNAG, is $15.00 in U.S. Funds.

All slides submitted will be retained by *Metalsmith* and the Society of North American Goldsmiths for archival, research and educational purposes and as a resource for the editor of *Metalsmith*.

The submission of a signed entry form will indicate your permission for *Metalsmith* and/or SNAG to retain, duplicate, and publish your slides, and your agreement to the terms and conditions set forth in this prospectus.

Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to apply with images that have not been widely circulated in *Metalsmith* or other publications.

This prospectus and form may be duplicated.

To obtain additional application forms send a SASE to: 1996 Exhibition in Print, Box 575, RFD #1, Suncook, N.H. 03275. Please note that this address is only for requests of additional application forms. Do not send entry materials to this address.

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION

WHAT TO SUBMIT

The exhibition will be juried from 35 mm color slides. Each artist must submit 5 slides. Slides must be of professional quality and should be in standard cardboard or plastic mounts, free from loose labels or tape. Each slide should be labeled with the following: artist's name, title of work, dimensions of work (height x width x depth), materials, year of completion and an "up" arrow in the top right hand corner of the front side. The slides should be clearly numbered to correspond to the information supplied on the entry form. During the jurying all five slides will be projected simultaneously.

CATEGORIES

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You are encouraged to enter work in only one of the categories listed on the left. Select your strongest work and enter in the category that *best* describes it. For example, if you enter a series of one-of-a-kind enamel brooches, you should apply under either "enamel" or "one-of-a-kind jewelry". If, however, you choose to apply with work that falls into more than one category (eg., two brooches and three teapots), you may apply under the heading "multiple categories". These categories are for jurying purposes only, and every category may not be represented in the publication.

Please include an artist's statement of no more than one page typed on a standard $8^1/_2$ x 11 inch sheet of paper with your name at the top. Your statement should relate to the work shown in your slides and state what you are doing in your work and why. Statements may occasionally be read at the request of the jury.

For biographical information in the case of publication, please include a one page resume typed on $8^1/_2$ x 11 inch paper with your name at the top. Resumes will not be regarded during the jurying process.

Entries must be postmarked by February 7, 1996.

Residents of the U.S. must include a stamped, self-addressed standard envelope with 32 cents postage. Residents of Canada and Mexico must include a self-addressed stamped envelope without postage. These envelopes are for purposes of notifying applicants of the jury's decision and not for the return of slides.

Slides will not be returned.

Notifications will be mailed by the end of March 1996. Please note that phone calls regarding the jury's selection will not be accepted.

JURORS

Janet Koplos, a senior editor for *Art in America* residing in New York. Ms. Koplos has written extensively on the fine arts and crafts in dozens of publications including *American Craft* and *Metalsmith.*

Gaza Bowen, a mixed media sculptor from California and a recipient of a 1994 NEA grant. Among the museums collecting Ms. Bowen's work are the American Craft Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Getty Center in Santa Monica, California. She has lectured extensively and recently taught at California College of Arts and Crafts.

Pat Flynn, a studio jeweler residing in Maryland. Mr. Flynn has shown his work in galleries and museums throughout the U.S. and abroad. In 1994 he was awarded his third NEA grant. A solo exhibition of his jewelry was recently presented at the Susan Cummins Gallery in Mill Valley, California.

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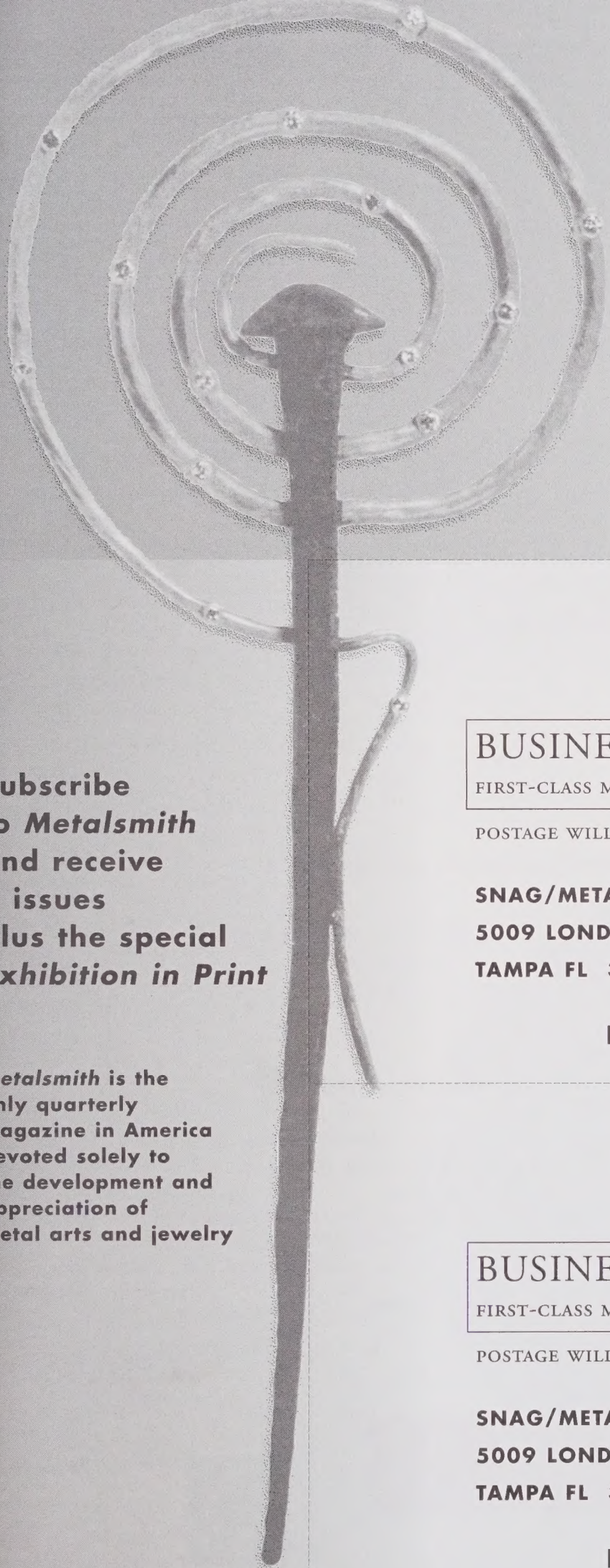

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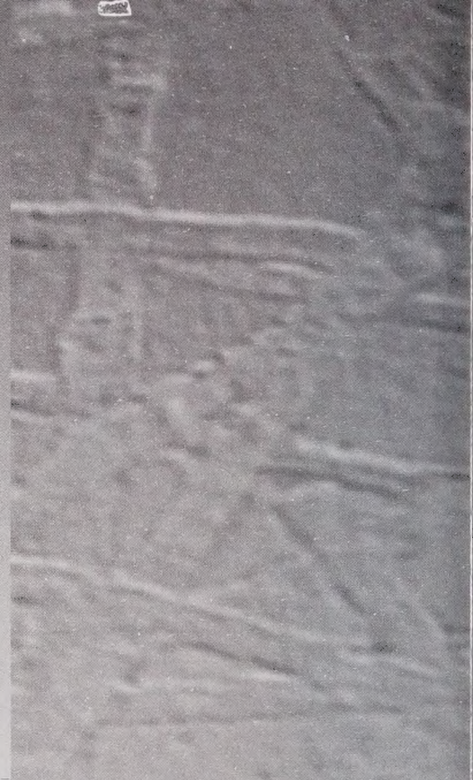

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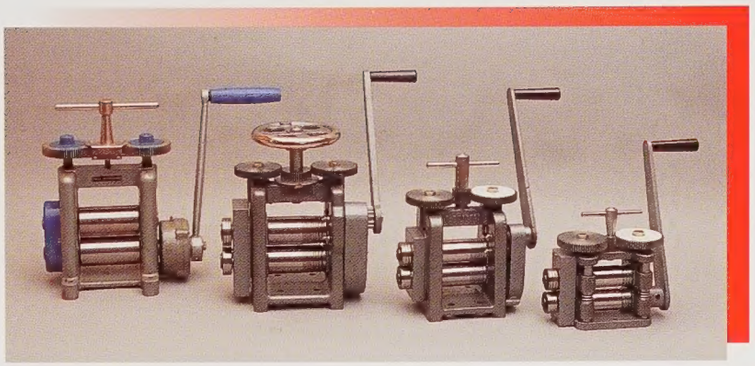

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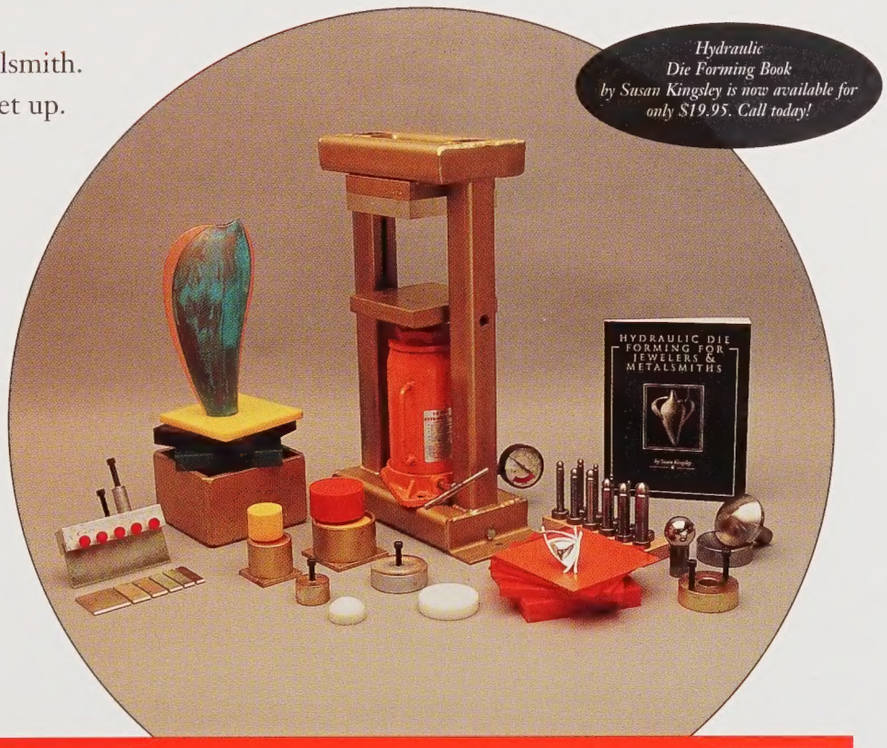
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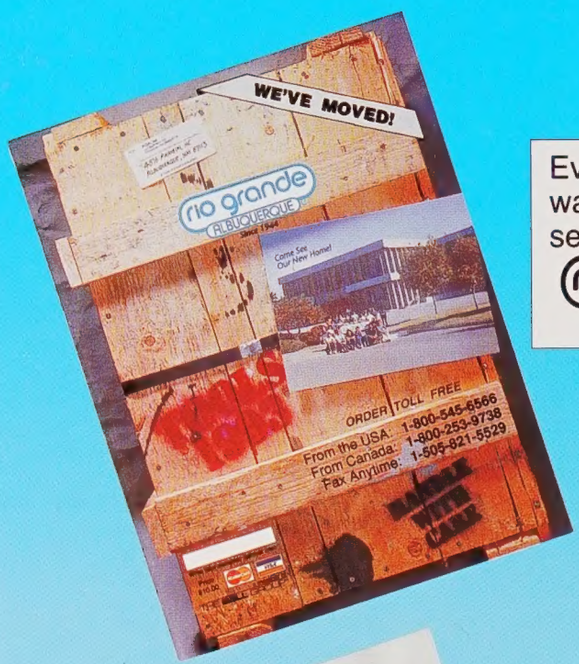

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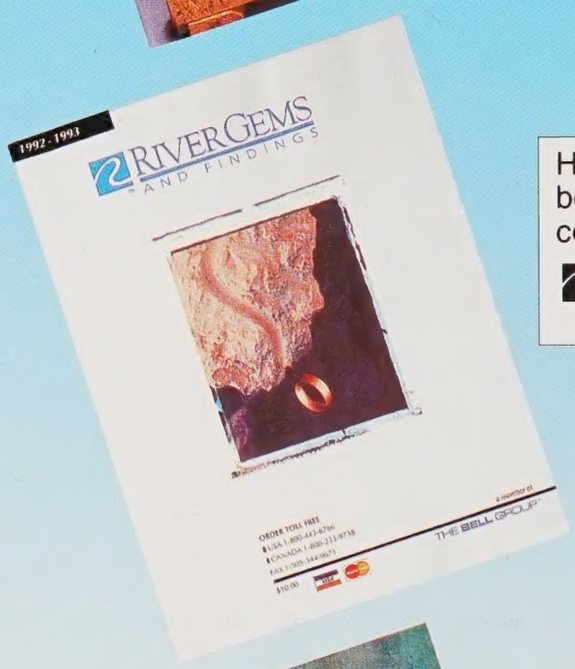

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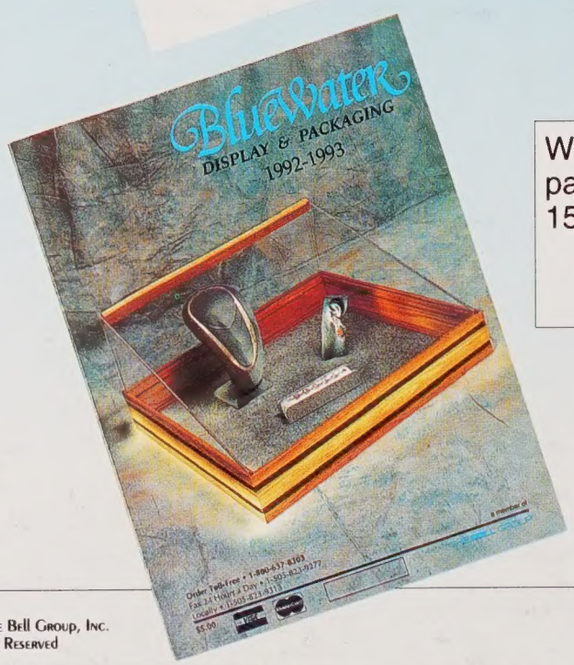

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